

Rolling Stone

Kevin Hart Is Killing It

The Making
of a Comedy
Superstar

Jimmy Page

Zeppelin's
Final
Reissues

A TRIBUTE TO Jon Stewart

James Taylor

My Life
in 15 Songs

Tame Impala

Psychedelic
Young Guns

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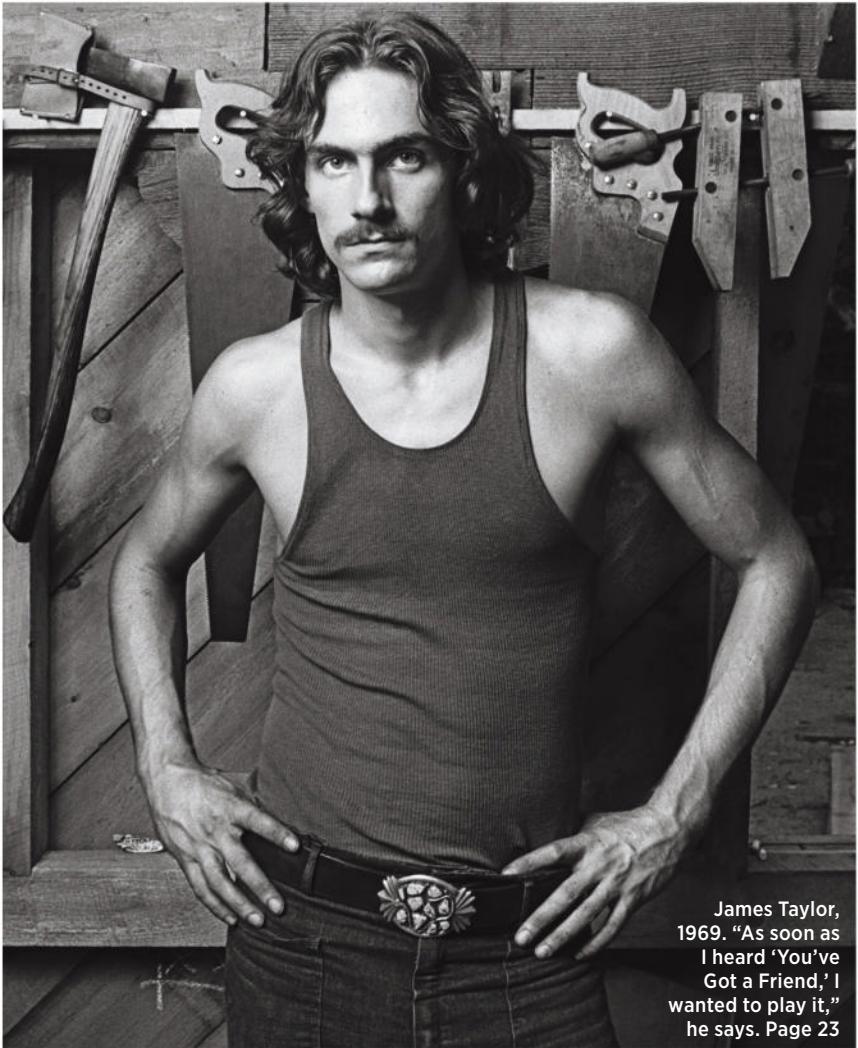
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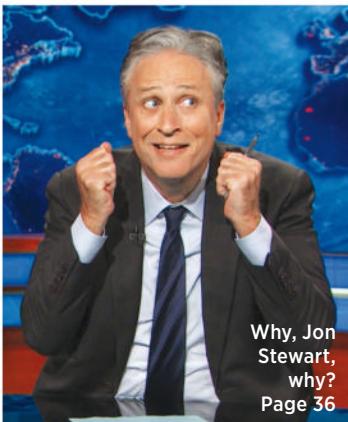
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James Taylor, 1969. "As soon as I heard 'You've Got a Friend,' I wanted to play it," he says. *Page 23*



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Bel Powley (right) and Kristen Wiig star in the new movie *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*. *Page 32*

ON THE COVER Kevin Hart photographed at Pier 59 Studios in New York on July 9th, 2015, by **Peggy Sirota**.

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MOVIES

AN ORAL HISTORY OF 'KIDS'

Twenty years after the release of *Kids*, director Larry Clark, screenwriter Harmony Korine, and co-stars Chloë Sevigny and Rosario Dawson talk about the making of the most controversial teen movie of all time.



LIVE MARIAN HILL AT 'ROLLING STONE'

Watch the male-female Brooklyn electronic-pop duo put on a sexy, sax-heavy set at our New York offices for our Sperry Sessions performance series.



LIST WORST FIRST BAND NAMES

Before they were household names, many of your favorite artists went by something else. Here are the worst ones, from Mookie Blaylock to the Rainbow Butt Monkeys.



POLITICS YOUR GUIDE TO ELECTION 2016

Who's in? Who's out? And who the hell are all these Republicans? Check ROLLING STONE's interactive guide to the presidential election, packed with explainers and much more.

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THIS WEEK ON

HUFFPOST LIVE JANET'S COMEBACK

After a long hiatus, Janet Jackson is back. The pop legend unveiled plans for a new album and a world tour. But as her new single "No Sleeep" sinks on the charts, will Janet reign supreme once again or flop?

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

AT HUFFPOSTLIVE.COM ON AUGUST 3RD



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LOVE LETTERS
& ADVICE



Rush to the Top

OPENING MY MAILBOX TO see Rush finally on the cover of ROLLING STONE ["From Rush With Love," RS 1238] and then reading such a well-written piece on these "three men of Willowdale" confirms that good things truly do come to those who wait.

Russ DiBella, Sicklerville, NJ

WHAT AN ENGAGING FEATURE by Brian Hiatt. Great musicians and thoughtful people. Their intelligence, humor, commitment to excellence, and humanity are inspirational.

Reid Whitton, Syracuse, NY

GEDDY LEE CALLS RECORDING the vocals for *Hemispheres* "just the worst two weeks of my life." Having listened to *Hemispheres* at least once a month for the past 37 years, and having loved every minute, I have to ask, "Wasn't it worth two terrible weeks of your life to give a fan years of musical bliss?"

Steve Dobrusin, Detroit

I WAS ONCE A ROCK SNOB. IF it wasn't Zeppelin, Sabbath, Alice Cooper or the other stalwarts, I wanted no part of it. Rush were interlopers. But I had a Rush-fanatic friend who never gave up on me. In 2011, he dragged me to one of the most staggering performances I've ever witnessed. Don't be like me. Last tour? Last chance.

Albert Adickes, San Diego

The Cost of Fracking

In RS 1238, contributing editor Paul Solotaroff wrote about Donna Young, the Utah midwife sounding the alarm about the rise in stillborn and infant deaths in her community, a fracking boomtown ["What's Killing the Babies of Vernal, Utah?"]. ROLLING STONE readers wrote in to comment.

EVENTUALLY, STUDIES will show that fracking is the cause of all these things and more. By then, the damage will be irreparable and blame will be a moot point. This is America, after all, where profit is king.

Jody Higinbotham
Via the Internet

THANK YOU FOR SHEDDING light on the dark side of the fracking boom. Those working in the industry can't think about their future health or question the promises of fracking's safety when without these jobs they can't put food on the table.

Andrew Protas
White Lake, MI

I GREW UP IN GARFIELD COUNTY, COLORADO, which Solotaroff mentions. I've always been struck by how people in oil country vote against their own interests; their inability to think long-term is painful. Why not elect officials who want to create green-energy jobs and training programs to benefit those now working the toxic oil and gas fields?

Sterling Black, Denver

ONE OF THE MOST FRUSTRATING aspects of an impor-

tant story like this one is the alleged lack of scientific consensus on what's causing the stillbirths in Vernal. Which makes deniers able to push back like they do when the subject is climate science. It's disheartening.

Shelly Delyp
Via the Internet

THE BABIES OF VERNAL – those stillborn and dead soon after birth – are the canaries in the coal mine



for the rest of the country, where new forms of filthy, unregulated energy extraction trump public health. We can satisfy our appetite for cheap oil, so who cares if toxic chemicals are absorbed into the bloodstream of our youngest citizens?

Thomas Bingham
Via the Internet

WHERE IS ERIN BROCKOVICH when you need her?

Jeff Greger
Via the Internet

right now as legislators seek an automatic five-year sentence for any immigrant who returns after being deported. Imagine the vulnerable families that will tear apart.

Fabian Hays
Via the Internet

I'M GLAD BILL CLINTON CAN now admit that he "overshot the mark" on incarceration in 1994, but his shortsightedness really galls me.

Lee Bates
Via the Internet

Soul Superstar

R&B AND RAP ARE REALLY missing message-giving artists like D'Angelo ["The Second Coming of D'Angelo," RS 1238]. The genre needs more folks who give a darn about what's going on around them. Brian Hiatt hit this interview out of the park with his candid questions.

Matthew Robinson
Via the Internet

Wilson's Triumph

JASON FINE'S LOVELY PROFILE of Brian Wilson captured a Beach Boy truly reborn ["Brian Wilson's Better Days," RS 1238]. Despite his anxiety, Wilson is touring, recording and enjoying his family. His daughter Daria speaks for all of us who love her brilliant, fragile father.

Ronan Gilbert
Via the Internet

Amy Forever

EVEN THOUGH I KNOW HOW it turns out, the story of Amy Winehouse continues to break my heart ["The Amy Winehouse We Never Knew," RS 1238]. Asif Kapadia's new documentary, *Amy*, pulls no punches and, I suppose, indicts all of us who loved and consumed her.

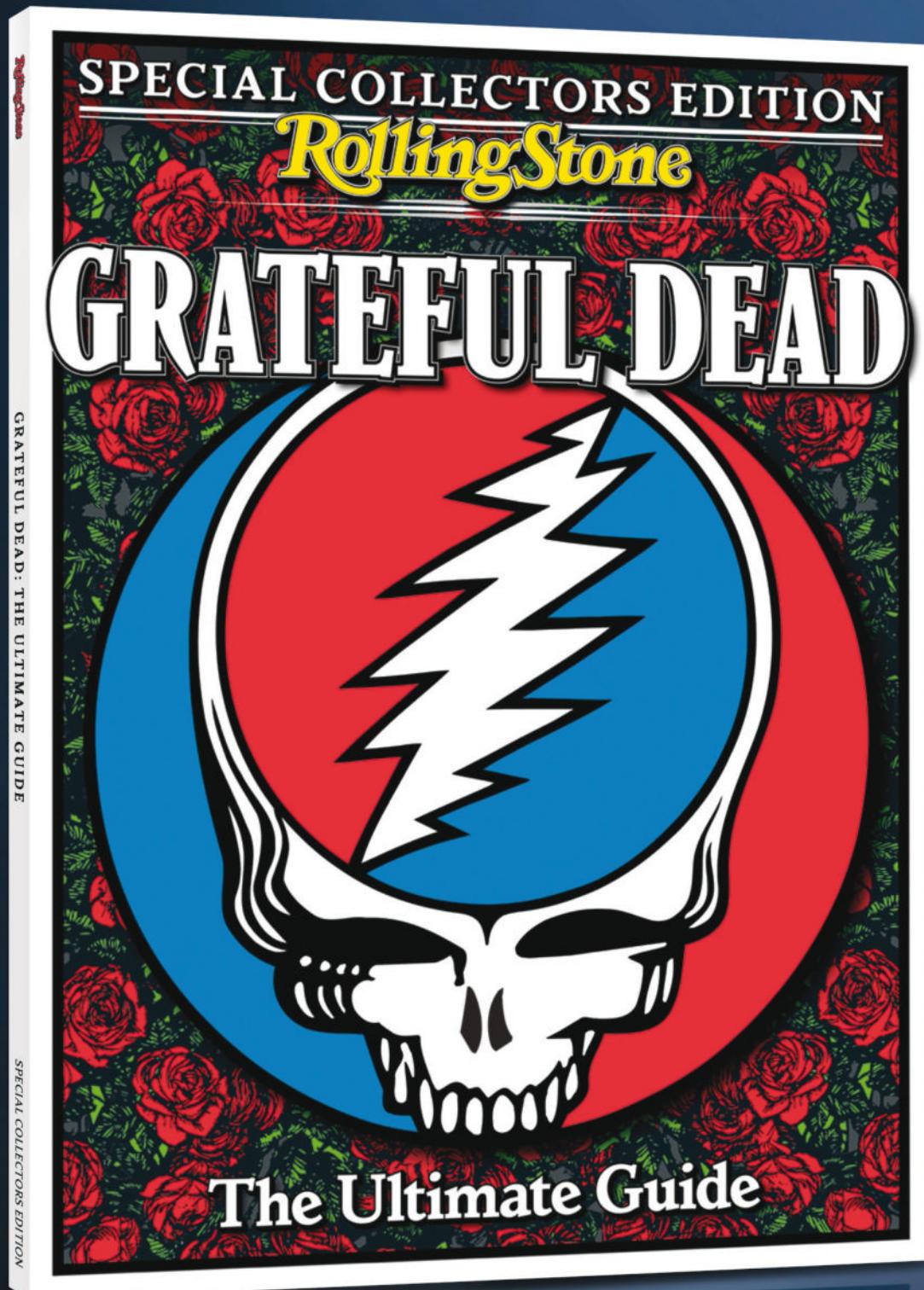
Beverley McGovern
Via the Internet

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THE PLAYLIST

OUR FAVORITE SONGS, ALBUMS AND VIDEOS RIGHT NOW



1. Drake “Energy” video

Drizzy makes fun of his many imitators by CGI-grafting his face onto Miley Cyrus, Oprah, President Obama and more in this very funny (and slightly creepy) video for the catchiest song from *If You’re Reading This It’s Too Late*.



2. Foals “What Went Down”

Find a lighter and spark it up high – even if you’re home alone, the U.K. rockers’ driving new single hits like an arena anthem.

3. Kurt Vile

“Pretty Pimpin”

Some of us look in the mirror to adjust our hair or pick a bit of spinach out of our teeth. Kurt Vile stares at his reflection and writes a shaggy psychedelic folk-rock tune about it. Nice!

6. Lana Del Rey

“Honeymoon”

Planning a goth wedding this summer? Now you’ve got the perfect song, courtesy of Lana’s latest wave of gorgeous gloom, from her upcoming third album.



7. Keith Richards

“Trouble”

Spin this salty jam for the first time, and you just might think you’ve stumbled across a most excellent outtake from *Nellcôte* in the Seventies. Nope – it’s a promising preview of Keith’s upcoming solo album, *Crosseyed Heart*, due this fall.



EXPERT OPINION



Albert Hammond Jr.

We asked the Strokes guitarist – whose new solo LP, *Momentary Masters*, is out now – to tell us what he thinks of five songs.

CLASSIC

Eddie Cochran “Somethin’ Else”

I’m hearing this song for the first time, and it sounds so modern. But I don’t know if we walk that line of so-tough and so-pop anymore. Oh, the times, they keep changing.

The Rolling Stones “Can’t You Hear Me Knocking”

This is one of my favorite songs. It feels thick with humidity and wonder. It’s sexual and fun.

Neil Young “Sample and Hold”

I love Neil Young very much, but I didn’t enjoy the verse on this one that much. Maybe you had to be there. I’m going to loop the chorus for my pleasure.

NEW

The Libertines “Gunga Din”

What a fun return! I’m intrigued. The guitar in the intro is cleverly simple.

Tame Impala “Cuz I’m a Man”

This took me a few listens, but it’s got me excited. I can’t put my finger on what it reminds me of, but, fuck, it’s great.

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Rock & Roll

How the Foos Saved Their Summer

Dave Grohl on overcoming a devastating leg injury – and rethinking ‘Sonic Highways’ By Kory Grow

DAVE GROHL WAS LOST IN A fog. It was mid-June, a few days after he had toppled off a 12-foot-tall platform during a Foo Fighters gig in Sweden, breaking his right fibula and dislocating his ankle. The damage was signi-

[Cont. on 14]



WATCH THE THRONE
Grohl at RFK Stadium in Washington, D.C., on July 4th.

FOO FIGHTERS

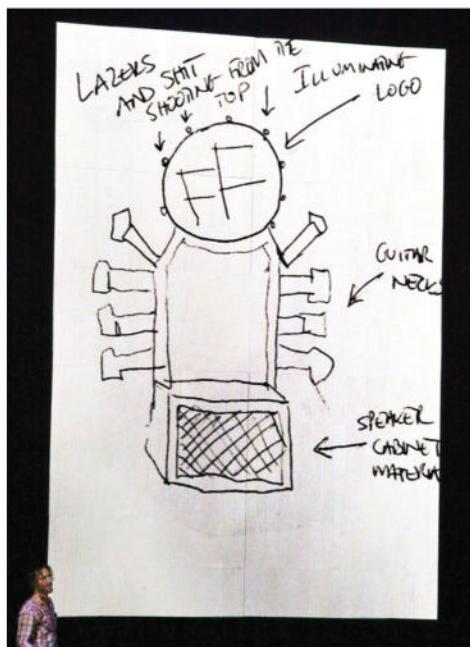
[Cont. from 13] ficitant, requiring surgery and six metal screws in his leg. "A physical therapist told me it was like my ankle got into a 40-mile-per-hour car crash," Grohl says. "It's like my ankle got its ass kicked by Ronda Rousey." Worst of all, the Foos had to cancel the rest of their European tour, seven dates in all. Their upcoming North American tour – including a 20th-anniversary concert in Washington, D.C., on July 4th – was in jeopardy as well.

Now, as he sat in an OxyContin-induced haze in London, Grohl had a mystic vision that saved the Foos' summer plans. Reaching for a stack of hotel stationery, he sketched a "ridiculous, primitive drawing" of a fantastical, guitar-adorned throne that would allow him to prop up his bum leg in concert, and he had Foo Fighters' lighting guy build it. "When I saw that thing, I just fucking cracked up," Grohl says, laughing. "It was exactly what I wanted it to be – and it worked!"

Thanks to the throne, Grohl was onstage for the July 4th show – and for every Foos gig since. For a guy who's used to prowling the stage, sitting down for an entire show has been a challenge. "I've got my leg up on that thing, but the rest of my body is like fucking Joe Cocker up there," he says. "It's insane." Grohl has been opening shows by playing the riff to "Everlong" from behind a giant curtain, which pulls away to reveal him sitting, leg outstretched, to the elated laughter of fans. At the Foos' gig at Boston's Fenway Park, Grohl brought out his orthopedic surgeon to help the band cover the White Stripes' "Seven Nation Army." Grohl says the outpouring of support from fans has been overwhelming: Every night

when he takes the stage, he looks out and is met by crowds of people wearing T-shirts emblazoned with an X-ray of his broken leg. "It's really weird," he says.

The Foo Fighters tour runs into the fall, with some short breaks, but the band is already beginning to focus on the second season of its HBO series, *Sonic Highways*.



ELECTRIC CHAIR Grohl's sketch of the guitar throne, built by his lighting guy.

Grohl hints that the premise of the show – the Foos travel to different cities and write and record with local heroes – might get tweaked this time around. "I have a pretty good idea of what I'd like to do," Grohl says. "It doesn't always have to be the Foo Fighters. It doesn't always have to be America. I've already contacted a ton of musicians to

see if they'd be interested in being involved, and every single one of them said yes."

In the meantime, Grohl can celebrate the debut album from Teenage Time Killers, an all-star punk band featuring Grohl as well as current and former members of Slipknot, Fear, Dead Kennedys, Lamb of God, Minor Threat, the Germs and Alkaline Trio, among others. The group was spearheaded by Reed Mullin, drummer for hardcore-metal vets Corrosion of Conformity, a longtime friend of Grohl. "Reed was my drumming hero when I was 15 or 16," he says. "I've stolen so many of his drum riffs from COC's *Antimosity* over the years."

Grohl assumes an unlikely role in Teenage Time Killers: bassist. The group simply asked the Foo singer if he wanted to play the four-string on a number of songs. "It's probably my favorite instrument to play standing up," Grohl says. He handles bass on 11 of the 20 songs on the group's newly released debut, *Greatest Hits Vol. 1*. "I knocked out my parts in a day or two, and it was so much fun," says Grohl. "It was like hardcore karaoke with a bass."

Mullin is also organizing a Teenage Time Killers concert in L.A., to take place in the late summer with as many of the album's participants as possible – including Grohl. "Oh, my God, I need to learn those fucking songs again," Grohl says about the prospect. "Those are hard."

Grohl isn't sure how long it'll be before he regains full use of his leg. His cast came off within his first week back on the road, and he recently used crutches to walk along the catwalk for acoustic performances of "My Hero" and "Times Like These." "That show, when the throne comes out and I just fucking jump off it and start running – it's going to be a pretty awesome moment," he says.



A LONG JOURNEY TO NUMBER ONE

Omi's 'Cheerleader' is a smash hit eight years in the making

About eight years ago, Jamaican singer Omar Pasley woke up with a melody in his head that he couldn't shake. It was the beginning of "Cheerleader," which has since become one of the more unlikely – and slowest-rising – Number One pop hits ever. "Cheerleader" started as a radio favorite in

Jamaica in 2012, became a hit all over Europe in 2014, and finally topped the Hot 100 in mid-July. "Man," says Pasley, "it's overwhelming."

Pasley, 28, grew up loving rappers like Tupac and Eminem, but things changed in his early twenties. "I got exposed to melodic aspects of music when I started listening to John Legend, Nat King Cole and Sam Cooke," he says. His life changed forever when he met with Jamaican

producer Clifton Dillon, who fell in love with the early version of "Cheerleader" and brought in drumming great Sly Dunbar to play on it. German producer Felix Jaehn later created a remix that has since taken over the world. Now, Omi hopes to have his debut album out by the fall. "The song is like being off to a good start in a race," he says. "All I have to do is maintain my momentum and keep my composure."

ANDY GREENE

Jimmy Page Wraps Zep Reissues With a Bang

Guitarist preps blowout 'Coda' set and promises to get busy on new material

JIMMY PAGE CAN TELL YOU EXACTLY when he will become a solo artist again: on August 2nd, right after the Led Zeppelin guitarist concludes his year-long deluxe reissues of the band's studio albums with the July 31st release of expanded editions of 1976's *Presence*, 1979's *In*



LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD
Page in 1977 (above) and this year.

Through the Out Door and the 1982 compilation, *Coda*. On August 1st, "I'll wipe my brow, lay in bed and read the paper," Page says with a grin in a New York hotel room. The next day, "I'll pick up the guitar, and I won't stop from that point on."

"I've got new material," he insists. "I've played guitar in so many different styles, and I want to revisit them all." Page says that "the focus and energies I have been

putting into this other stuff" – including 2012's *Celebration Day*, the album and DVD from Zeppelin's 2007 reunion concert, and *Sound Tracks*, a recent four-disc set of Page's Seventies and Eighties music for films – "meant that I couldn't play guitar or get involved in a project, then keep breaking away to do this. Now it's time."

Page still clearly recalls the way he felt about his instrument after Zeppelin broke up in 1980 following the death of drummer John Bonham. "I didn't want to play the guitar," Page admits. "It was going to bring up too much." A short time later, he learned that he was contractually obligated to produce one last Zeppelin studio LP. "I was like, 'Oh, my God, no.'" The result, *Coda*, "was a compromise, just an album of things left over."

Surprisingly, the new three-disc version of that album is now the killer climax of Page's Zeppelin-reissue series – "the mother of all *Codas*," he notes, with major rarities such as "Sugar Mama," an outtake from 1969's *Led Zeppelin* and two legendary 1972 recordings Page made in India with singer Robert Plant. That's it, too: "No more studio stuff," Page says firmly. "I made sure these reissues were thorough and complete. There is nothing else you can make a project out of."

Page is also adamant about one aspect of his impending solo work: Don't assume it will sound like his old band. "Because somebody plays guitar, why does

it mean they need a singer?" Page says heatedly. "Because people already have this image of things? No, I'll put my music together, then think about whether I need to embellish it with a singer."

Still, Page admits, "I play like I play. You hear it on *Celebration Day*. It's pretty good for a one-night shot." He laughs, then adds, "Whatever I do in the future, it won't be a one-night shot."

DAVID FRICKE



Bognanno

BREAKING

FROM STUDIO GEEK TO BAD-ASS ALT-ROCK SCREAMER

Former audio engineer Alicia Bognanno of Bully brings the Nineties thunder

Feels Like, the debut album from Nashville's Bully, opens with a blast of pain. "I remember getting too fucked up," singer-guitarist Alicia Bognanno yells at the top of her lungs over churning chords. "I remember showing up at your house/And I remember hurting you so bad/And I remember the way your sheets smelled." For Bognanno – who also produced and engineered the album – capturing the song's raw fury on record was no challenge. "'I Remember' is a minute and 25 seconds of screaming," she says. "I used ambient mics to make it feel a little bit like I felt inside."

Bognanno, 25, learned how to get that *120 Minutes*-worthy sound from an alt-rock OG: In college, she interned at Electrical Audio, the Chicago studio founded by the Nirvana and Pixies producer Steve Albini. Working on her own music in off-hours, Bognanno developed her analog technique. "My head doesn't work the same way Pro Tools does," she says. "Once I started using a tape machine, it clicked."

Late last year, she returned to Electrical Audio to record *Feels Like* with her three bandmates. While the album is out on an imprint of Columbia Records, Bognanno says signing with a major was about creative control more than selling LPs. "[The label was] 100 percent supportive of me engineering the record and doing what I wanted creatively," she says. "That was a really big deal for us." SIMON VOZICK-LEVINSON

Gary Clark Jr.'s Texas Medicine

How the blues guitarist returned home to Austin and made a fiery new album

GARY CLARK JR.'S 2012 MAJOR-label debut, *Blak and Blu*, was one of the most acclaimed blues albums in recent memory. Recording in Los Angeles with pop and rock producers Mike Elizondo (Dr. Dre, Fiona Apple) and Rob Cavallo (Green Day), the singer-guitarist fused classic influences like Willie Dixon and Albert King with a love for Nirvana and hip-hop, yanking traditional American music into the present.

For his new album, *The Story of Sonny Boy Slim*, the 30-year-old Clark brought it all back home, recording in his native Austin in search of a more relaxed, familiar vibe. "I went in feeling vulnerable — I was very aware of the sophomore slump," says Clark. "I really wanted to just come home and be in the studio, hang out and go back to my house."

While *Blak and Blu* has a slick, L.A. feel, *Sonny Boy Slim* is pure Austin soul. Starting in March of last year, Clark headed into Austin's Arlyn Studios with little more than ideas and grooves, self-producing the album with his live engineer Bharath "Cheex" Ramanath and Arlyn's chief engineer, Jacob Sciba. "These guys," says Clark, referring to Sciba and fellow engineer Joseph Holguin, "put in a lot of



HOMECOMING
Clark at Arlyn Studios in Austin

hard work to let me be in this room and let loose."

Sessions would often take place late at night and sometimes continue past daybreak, fueled by beloved Arlyn co-owner Lisa Fletcher's combination of locally made vodka and fresh-squeezed

grapefruit juice. Sciba grins and lifts a glass: "You want to know how we made this album?" he says. "This right here." "I would come in the morning," says Fletcher, "they would still be at it."

The music that emerged ranges from the screaming "Grinder" (about a financially strapped family) to the stomping funk of the Prince-like "Star" to the acoustic gospel "Church." The album title, *The Story of Sonny Boy Slim*, seems to suggest a biographical element, but Clark says the album is driven more by a feeling than a concept: "The only real theme is, 'Through all the bullshit, there's always hope.' That's kinda it."

Clark recently had a son, Zion, with his partner, fashion model Nicole Trunfio. Earlier this year, he debuted material from *The Story of Sonny Boy Slim* at Bonnaroo, and he'll soon be hitting the road with his longtime touring band, which also played on the album. "I really just wanted to put everything together and be 1,000 percent who I am," Clark says of the finished product. "This album is exactly what that is: loud."

JOE GROSS

ACTIVISM

A Teenage Climate Warrior

Meet the 15-year-old hip-hop artist impacting the environmental debate

COLOrado-raised eco-activist and rapper Xiuhtezcatl Martinez is only 15 years old, but he's already a leading voice in the environmental movement. In June, Martinez stunned representatives of nearly 200 countries when he delivered an impassioned climate-change address at the U.N., and he'll soon appear in a short film being produced by Al Gore's Climate Reality Project. Right now, he's busy preparing his band, Earth Guardians (which also includes his 12-year-old brother,

Itzcuahtli), for a main-stage set at the politically charged Arise festival in Colorado this month. "We don't just get recognition because we're young," Martinez says. "We get recognition because we bring a unique conscious hip-hop to the stage that people aren't seeing anywhere else." Martinez enjoys the attention his music is getting. But he's also young enough to know his entire generation is at risk if his message doesn't make a difference. "This isn't about the future," he says. "The crisis is here." COCO MCPHERSON



GET READY FOR 5SOS MANIA



Last year, Australian pop-punk band 5 Seconds of Summer released a chart-topping debut and opened for One Direction. They celebrated their success by getting right back into the studio: In January, they moved into a house in L.A. and brought in members of their favorite bands — Good Charlotte, Goldfinger and Sum 41 — to help write and produce an upcoming LP (tentatively due this year). Get ready for an all-out 5SOS blitz: They're headlining amphitheaters and arenas in America right now, and their label expects them to only get huger. "I think they absolutely have One Direction potential," says Capitol Records' Mitra Darab.

BRITTANY SPANOS

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Tame Impala's Vision Quest

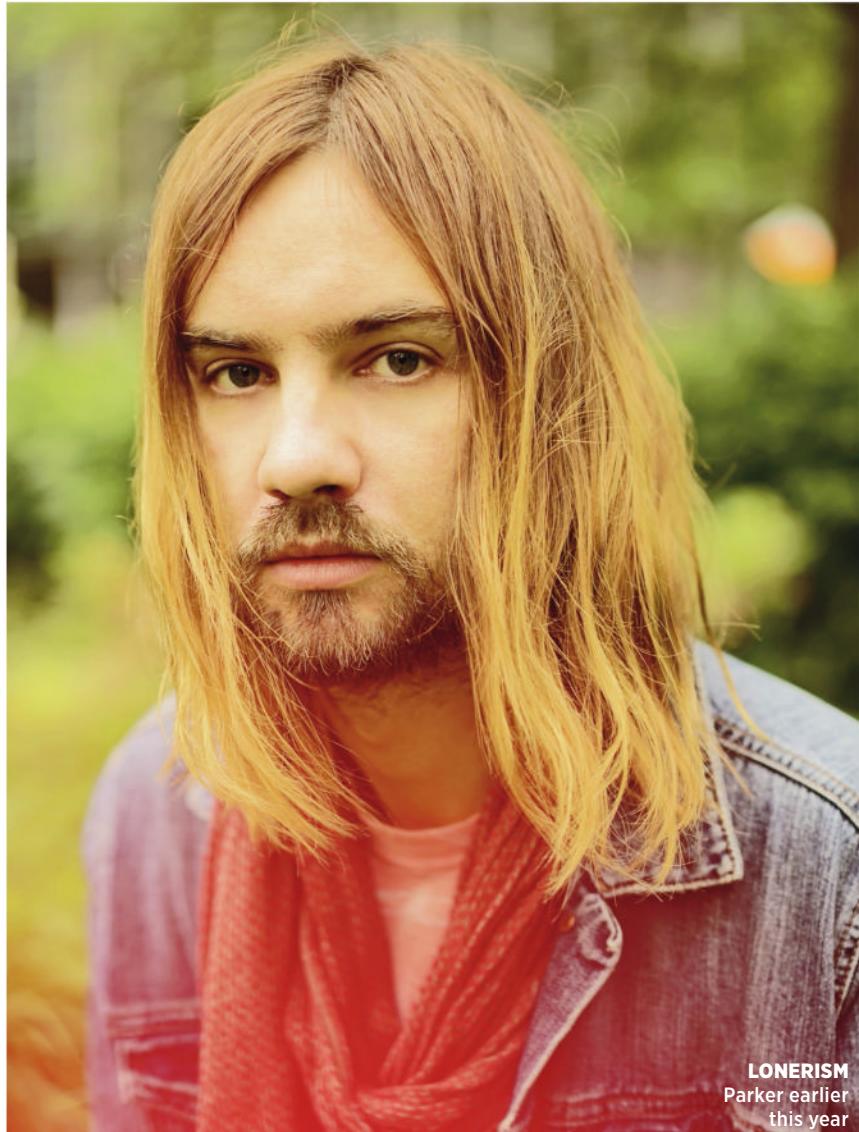
Kevin Parker is a psychedelic monk with talent to burn – now can he learn to loosen up? By Patrick Doyle

THE DOOR TO ROOM 1226 AT Austin's Hilton Garden Inn is propped open. Kevin Parker is in bed, and the room is a mess – empty cans of Tecate litter the tables; underwear, skinny jeans and scarves spill from a suitcase. Hangover cures – Advil, Tums – rest on the nightstand. "I like a messy hotel room," Parker deadpans in his thick Australian accent. "It's a little slice of home." His memory of last night is hazy, but he knows he climbed down from a second-floor balcony at the hotel and ended up in a nearby creek, where he sat on a rock and watched the sunrise. Today, he wants to take it easy: "Fucking codeine and *South Park*."

But it's the day before Tame Impala's five-week summer tour kicks off at Austin's Psych Fest, and Parker, 29, has work to do. So he struggles out of bed and helps his sound man lug laptops and keyboards into his room. They sit at a desk and connect a MIDI keyboard to a Mac, then turn on an oscilloscope machine, a device that measures electrical signals. They're typically used to check whether a TV or a medical scanner is working, but Parker discovered that if you plug an instrument into one, it produces trippy images. He's been projecting them on a huge screen during Tame Impala shows ever since.

Some bands hire a production team to handle onstage visuals; Parker does it himself – along with just about every element of Tame Impala. He played almost every note on the band's three albums by himself before bringing the songs – paranoid, self-critical head trips buried in a haze of psychedelic riffs and spaced-out synths – to the rest of the group to execute live.

The results have been impressive: Tame Impala just played main-stage slots at Coachella and Governors Ball and will headline Radio City Music Hall this fall. Paul McCartney's a fan, and Mark Ronson has called them his "favorite rock & roll band." "Sonically, they're making some of the most exciting albums right now," says Jack Antonoff of Bleachers and fun. "They sound like a really exciting blend of future mixed with the early Seventies – this incredible, bizarre blend."



LONERISM
Parker earlier
this year

Parker's iron grip on his band's creative process has a downside. He spent months in a Paris apartment making Tame Impala's 2012 breakthrough, *Lonerism*, a process he calls "torture." "I felt like I was going insane," he adds. "I wasn't looking after myself, mentally, nutritionally." He tried to put less pressure on himself for the band's new album, *Currents*. "But I wound up falling down completely the same hole again."

On much of the new album, Parker struggles with an identity crisis; he recorded the album after a breakup and as he chose to embrace life as a young rock star. "I've always had these morals I've sort of put on myself: that excess is bad,"

he says. "I used to be into Buddhism and stuff. I was vegetarian. I was all about shutting things out." This applies to his music too – the record trades rock riffs for more electronic and R&B influences. "I grew up in the grunge era," he says. "I've always resisted the idea of being part of a machine, wanting just to be an artist in my own right. But at some point I just realized shutting things out took more energy than just letting it in."

Parker's phone rings; there's a car waiting to take him to hear the vinyl edition of *Currents* for the first time. As he leaves his room, there's a note under his door – a fan in 1212 is wondering if she can get a picture. "That's weird," he says, quieting down

when he realizes that room is across from his. "Maybe I'll knock on her door. That's never happened before!"

A day earlier, Tame Impala stood on an Austin soundstage rehearsing, smoke machines and all. The mood is light – between songs, a few band members plan a visit to a New Orleans strip club, and Parker sarcastically wonders why some crew members have disappeared around 4:20 p.m. Parker suggests several tweaks to the songs: a little more bass drive during "Feels Like We Always Go Backwards," and for drummer Julien Barbagallo to play "a little more sensitively" on a new song, "Eventually." When the drummer doesn't quite get it, Parker takes a seat and demonstrates the part himself.

As the clock approaches 8 p.m. and the band runs out of beer, his tone grows stern. "We're running out of fuck-around time," he says. "Let's try to play them in a way that doesn't sound embarrassing." When multi-instrumentalist Jay Watson suggests they figure out one of his keyboard parts at soundcheck tomorrow, Parker barks, "There is no soundcheck. It's a fucking festival."

He doesn't sound like a dick, just a taskmaster, and the band is used to it. "He always wanted to control every element," says Watson, who also plays in the Tame Impala offshoot band Pond. "Like how hard I hit the cymbal. It took a few years to be comfortable getting told what to do all the time." (Watson doesn't complain about his job: "I get to drink beer midday!")

Parker has always preferred to work alone. He grew up in Perth, a sparkling city on Australia's west coast that's one of the most remote metropolises in the world, 2,000 miles from Sydney and Melbourne. He calls himself "essentially an only child." His parents split up when he was four; he went to live with his mom in the eastern suburbs of Perth, while his brother went to live with his wealthier father, an accountant for a gold-mining company. "I have almost no memory of my parents ever speaking to each other," he says. "They split up on bad terms. I assumed that's what family life was like. Just essentially a soap opera."

By the time he was 12, Parker was experimenting with multitrack recording. As a teen, he loved the Smashing Pumpkins, Silverchair and even Korn ("I think I had a lot in common with the lead singer. He had kind of family issues"). But Parker calls his first Flaming Lips show a spiritual moment. "It completely fucked me up,"

he says. "I'm really into the way music can affect you, emotionally, spatially. The idea that music can make you feel like you're not standing with two feet on the ground is really interesting to me."

Parker briefly studied engineering and astronomy in college, but spent most of his time at a run-down duplex apartment with several future members of Tame Impala. The house became the center of Perth's weird, avant-garde psychedelic scene. "We listened to Sabbath, like, 18 hours a day," says Watson. They grew a huge weed plant in their backyard. Parker would get high and record kids playing baseball, then distort their voices through delay pedals.

Parker says. He excitedly shares that only McCartney and Lennon have written more Number One hits, and notes that Britney Spears' "...Baby One More Time" was originally written for the Backstreet Boys. He starts singing the chorus: "You can hear it, right?"

"It's always been my fantasy – this idea of [being] someone behind the scenes, pulling strings, writing these fucking amazing songs," he says. "It gives pop music this intellectual side. It makes it more like a craft. It inspires me."

"**I SURVIVED,**" PARKER SAYS IN THE lobby of Tame Impala's hotel in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, a month after our Austin meeting. The band is about to play New York's Governors Ball, the final gig of its U.S. tour. Parker's wrist is covered in wristbands from other recent festivals. He's not that impressed with the Gov Ball site. "It looks similar to a lot of the other festivals we've been doing," he says.

Parker just finished listening to a recording of the previous night's show in D.C., and he thinks the band has made a lot of progress in the past month. "It feels like the end of some epic movie." He can't wait to get home to Perth to see his girlfriend, an old friend from high school who works in advertising.

The band members eat a late breakfast, and hours later they're on the festival's main stage. "Holy shit," Parker says, gazing at the crowd. As frantic circular projections he designed dance behind him, Parker straps on a Rickenbacker and launches into a roaring Sabbath-like riff. He grows more animated throughout the show, which peaks with the Zombies-like "Apocalypse Dreams." During a drum solo, Parker lifts his guitar over his head and steps onto the drum riser before collapsing to his knees, and then rolls onto his back as he keeps strumming.

Parker says he used to avoid "classic-rock-show moves" like these – he'd cringe whenever he saw a frontman venture into the crowd to touch the audience. Recently, though, he had a change of heart. "I did it once," he says, "and all these hands reached out and touched mine, and the looks on their faces was sheer joy. They were happy, they were stoked, and it kind of made their day. Then you have this weird sort of like moral dilemma – on one hand, it's a cliché rock move, but on the other, you made a lot of people happy for whatever reason. So maybe it's not such a bad thing. What's so bad about it?"



SICK VISUALS

Tame Impala onstage at Austin Psych Fest in May. Like everything else the band does, Parker controls its trippy light show.

"Psychedelic music became a way of life," says Parker.

Because Perth is so isolated – "People are generally content to just impress the other people in Perth" – Parker was shocked when he was asked to play shows in Sydney and Melbourne after he put some of his original songs on MySpace in 2007.

In 2010, the band's first LP, *Innerspeaker*, earned it prime U.K. festival spots, and publications like *NME* started comparing Parker to John Lennon. In fact, Parker has never listened to a full Beatles album – he's more likely to play Daft Punk and Timbaland on the bus. Parker decided to embrace those influences on *Currents*, which adds slow-jam falsetto, vocoder and disco beats to their sound. While recording, he listened mostly to Nineties R&B: "As a teenager I thought I was supposed to hate it." Between sips of rosé at dinner one night in Texas, he spends several minutes talking about the Swedish music producer Max Martin. "He's my idol at the moment,"

POINT OF VIEW

ALLEN STONE

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ON THE MORNING AFTER HIS NEW ALBUM,
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You'd never know he had played a show in Brooklyn the night before: musician Allen Stone's energy is palpable, but that's not surprising for someone who's played over 600 shows in the last three years. With a jam-packed, ever-moving schedule, Stone moves adeptly from moment to moment: the only thing that goes with him everywhere are his signature glasses. He's laidback, warm, and pokes fun of himself in between sincere descriptions of his life on the road, the songwriting process, his evolution as a musician, and what matters most to him. His low-key attitude, affable visage, and skill at adapting to any situation put everyone around him at ease. His music is like that, too—sincere, swingy, relatable, somewhere between funk, soul, and R&B, with shifts so smooth you don't even notice them.



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TWO MUSKETEERS
Quavo (left)
and Takeoff

PROFILE

Red-Hot, Rich and Down One Member

Atlanta rap trio Migos refuse to let courtroom drama slow down their rapid ascent

Pretty nice, huh?" Quavo sweeps a hand around the matte-black interior of his BMW X6. The 24-year-old leader of the hyperstylish rap trio Migos is doing 60 on a highway through midtown Atlanta. Takeoff, his three-years-younger nephew and partner in the group, leans back in the front passenger seat. "Put your seat belt on," Quavo warns as he hits the accelerator.

Since they achieved fame with 2013's ultrachatty "Versace" — a high-fashion flaunt whose distinctive rhyme patterns echoed through subsequent tracks from stars like Drake and Kanye — Migos have been on a hot streak. (The name is short for "amigos," and they've hinted at links to drugrunning slang.) Their boundless charisma and creative flair have made fans of street-level hustlers and Justin Bieber alike, and

their 2014 hit "Fight Night" was recently certified gold. But big drama has been hanging over them as they finish their first studio LP, *Yung Rich Nation*. Tonight, the group's third member — Quavo's cousin Offset — is languishing 200 miles away in a Statesboro, Georgia, jail due to an April incident in which all three were busted on drug and weapons charges. It's a major complication that couldn't have come at a worse time. Even so, Quavo shrugs it off: "Everybody gets slapped on the wrist. Offset will be back soon."

For now, the two free members of Migos have decided to go bowling. A little after 10 p.m., Quavo strolls into a brightly lit alley and rents a couple of lanes, paying the cashier with a bill from the fat roll of hundreds in the back pocket of his skinny gray Balmain jeans. A dark-blue T-shirt from Migos' clothing line, several flashy chains and medallions, a dia-



Offset

mond-encrusted Rolex and a large pair of nonprescription Versace eyeglasses complete a look that could be compared to a swagged-out Steve Urkel. Quavo trades in his gray Air Jordans for bowling shoes, chooses a red ball and throws an effortless strike on his first try. "Put that in ROLLING STONE!" he crows, kicking off a night in which he bowls with Lebowski-esque grace for two hours, scoring a solid 217.

Later, back at Migos' studio, Quavo and Takeoff sink into black leather couches and roll blunts. Quavo exhales a regal puff and jokingly banishes one of their crew from the room: "Get a gold plaque, then you can smoke in here." But there's an energy missing from the room without Offset, who's been locked up in Statesboro since the group's April 18th performance. Police arrested all three members, along with about a dozen associates, after allegedly finding less than an ounce of marijuana, some codeine syrup and four handguns in their tour vans. While Quavo and Takeoff were each able to post \$10,000 bail, Offset was forced to stay longer due to prior burglary and theft convictions on his rap sheet. The case made new headlines in early May, when Offset was hit with a battery charge after an alleged fight with another inmate. (He has pleaded not guilty.) "Offset's the animal out the group," Quavo says. "But he ain't no bad guy."

Migos' lawyers maintain that the weapons were brought to Statesboro by the group's security, and they question whether the police had any legal grounds to search the vehicles. "I think the entire arrest and the entire prosecution are strictly racially motivated," says Quavo's attorney, Cris Schneider. "Both law enforcement and the prosecutor know that they can't tie any of that stuff to any of these individuals."

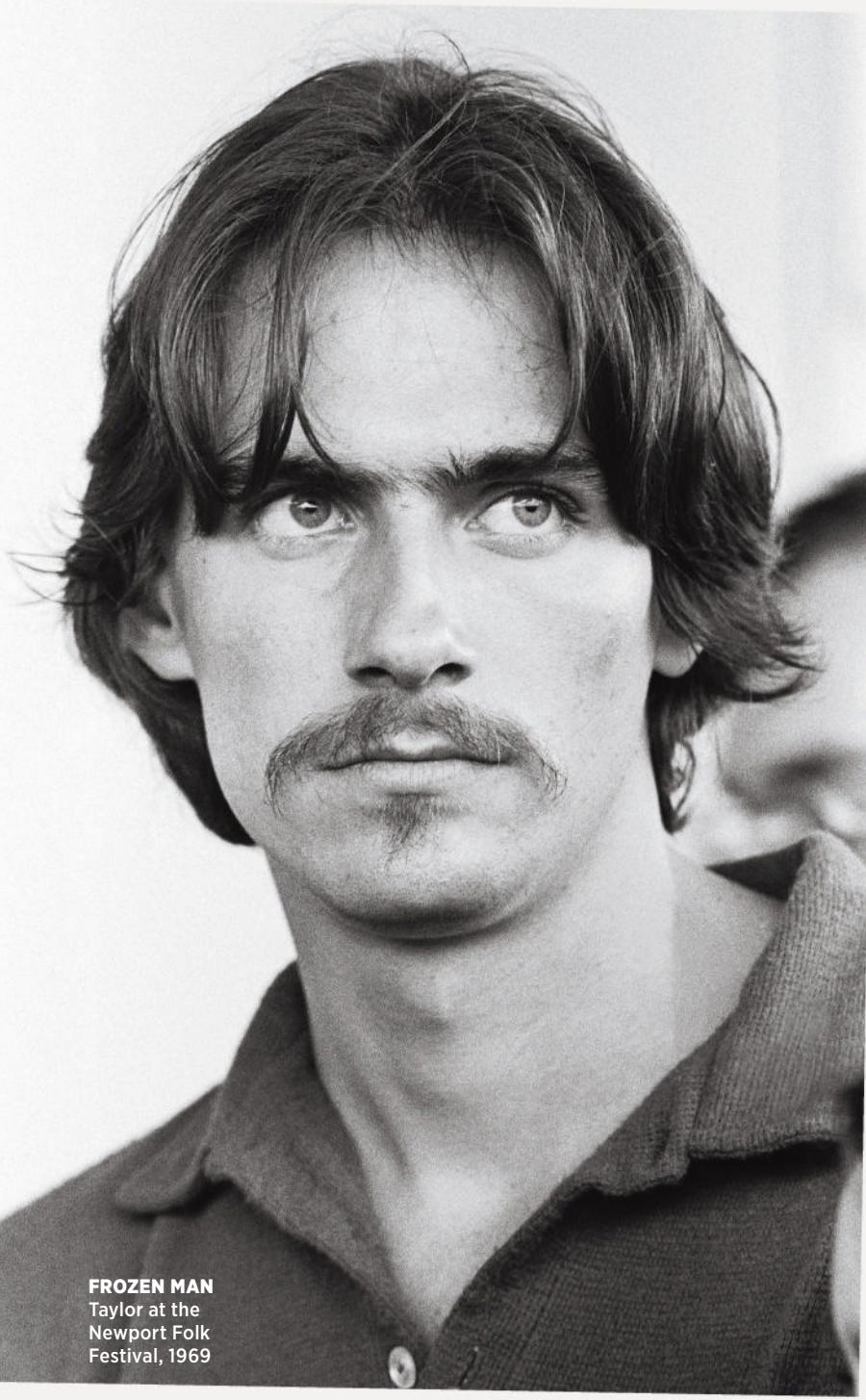
Offset sounds fairly upbeat when he calls me from Statesboro a few days earlier. "I'm chilling," he says. "I mean, I'm in jail, so there's not much going on."

He tells me he's been working out, writing lyrics and talking to his bandmates daily. "We pray together," he says. "We're family. We believe in loyalty."

Around 2 a.m., Quavo steps into a vocal booth and begins spinning cocaine metaphors over a skeletal beat. "Marilyn Manson, Marilyn Manson," he raps. "Know some niggas cooking up that Marilyn Manson." He repeats the lines five or six times, building from a moody mumble to an excited yell. By 3 a.m., with a rough song sketched out, he's twisting up another blunt in the control room. "Shit," he says. "All we gotta do is keep making hits and let God judge." **SIMON VOZICK-LEVINSON**

MY LIFE IN 15 SONGS

James Taylor



FROZEN MAN
Taylor at the
Newport Folk
Festival, 1969

Addiction, absent fathers and survival: The surprisingly dark stories behind some folk-rock classics **By Andy Greene**

AMES TAYLOR'S NEW ALBUM, *Before This World*, is his first collection of original songs in 13 years, though he wasn't exactly taking it easy during that stretch – he toured regularly, released live and cover albums, and helped raise twin boys, now 14. But a few years ago, Taylor realized that he needed to make songwriting a top priority in his life if he was ever going to release another album of new songs. So he borrowed a friend's apartment and camped out to write what would become *Before This World*, a sweet, reflective disc that evokes memories of his classic 1970s albums. "I'm not the type of musician who reinvents himself over and over again," he says. "I am a slow evolution of a style of recording and writing, and I do think that in ways I get better at it."

At 67, Taylor is able to look back honestly on his life and career, including the darker moments – from his heroin addiction to his struggles as a parent (he fathered two children, Sally, 41, and singer-songwriter Ben, 38, with ex-wife Carly Simon). "Sally and Ben turned out brilliantly," he says. "But I can't take much credit for them. I was a pretty compromised father. Addiction is delayed development, so I may have been late in becoming an adult."

Sitting in a luxury suite at Fenway Park before his beloved Boston Red Sox took on the New York Yankees one recent evening, Taylor walked us through 50 years of songwriting, going all the way back to getting signed to Apple Records by the Beatles in 1968.

Rainy Day Man 1967

In 1966, I was living at the Albert Hotel in New York with my best friend, Zach Wiesner, who wrote this song with me. We had one of two rooms at the hotel that hadn't been destroyed in a fire, so it was pretty cheap.

The "rainy day man" was a dope connection. I had taken my first opiate in 1966. Joel "Bishop" O'Brien, the drummer in

"The 'rainy day man' was a dope connection. Heroin was the key to my lock. I was pretty much born to shoot dope, and I was really gone for the next 20 years."

the Flying Machine, was an addict. I spent a lot of time at his apartment, so it was just a matter of time before I tried heroin. I was pretty much born to shoot dope – it was the key to my lock, so I really was gone for the next 20 years.

Something in the Way She Moves 1968

I spoke to my dad on the phone while I was living in New York, and he didn't like the way I sounded. He was right: I was strung out, malnourished and kind of beat. He arrived the next day with the family station wagon and drove me back to North Carolina, where I had grown up. I took time to recover, and around Christmas 1967 I talked my parents into buying me a ticket to London, where I had a friend who agreed to put me up for a few weeks.

I was hoping to sing in clubs or even on the streets, but I ended up getting in touch with Peter Asher, who had just started working for Apple Records. He got me an audition with Paul McCartney and George Harrison, where I played them this song. Paul said to Peter, "You feel like producing this guy?" And Peter said, "Yeah."

The song is about an early girlfriend and the calm you feel in the presence of someone who knows you really well. When I heard George Harrison used the title for the opening words of "Something," I was thrilled. I didn't feel like I was being poached at all – besides, "Something in the Way She Moves" quotes the Beatles' "I Feel Fine": "She's around me almost all the time/And I feel fine."

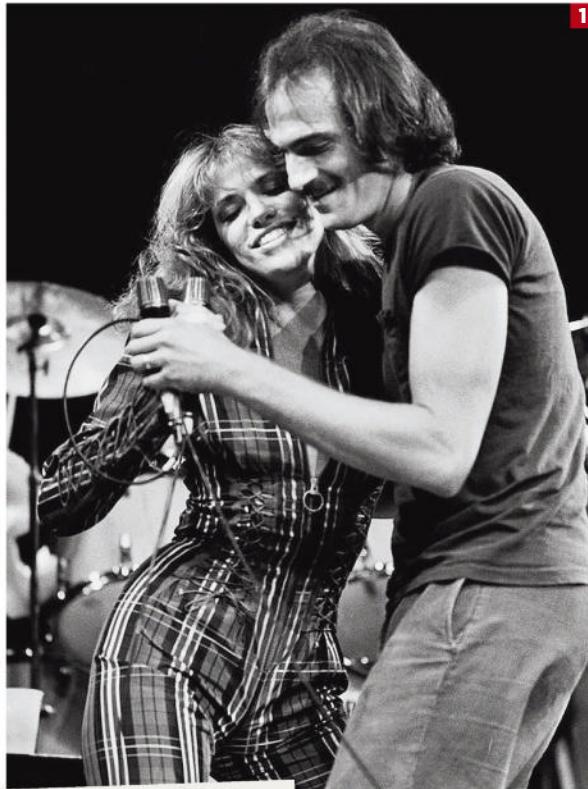
Carolina in My Mind 1968

I was making my first album, at Trident Studios in London, just as the Beatles were recording the White Album nearby. I realized how lucky I was to be listening to the Beatles playbacks and watching their process in the studio, but at the same time that I was surrounded by this

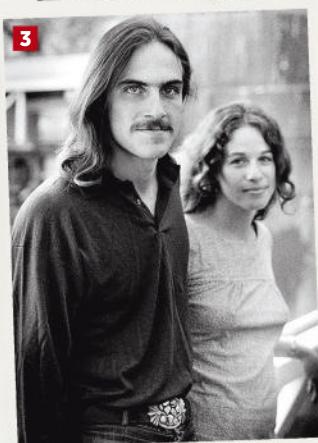
holy host of my absolute idols, I missed my home in North Carolina. This captured that feeling of being called away to another place.

Sweet Baby James 1970

Allen Klein took over Apple Records in 1969. We had it in our contract that we could audit him to see what our sales were, and he didn't want anybody looking at the books, so he let us go. In fact, he let everybody on the label go except the Beatles.



1



3



2

YOU'VE GOT FRIENDS
① Taylor with then-wife Carly Simon, 1979. (2) With John Lennon, 1977. (3) With Carole King, 1971, the year of "You've Got a Friend."

I came back to the States and found out my brother Alex had had a kid. I decided to write a song for the baby boy, who was named after me. A little cowboy song. It starts as a lullaby, then the second half of the song – "the turnpike from Stockbridge to Boston..." – talks about what music means to me. It gets pretty spiritual by the end. I think it's my best song.

Steamroller 1970

I came back from London with my heroin habit raging again, so I went to rehab. Well, it wasn't rehab. It was a psychiatric facility in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. I'd been in a psychiatric hospital when I was 17, and I think that's just what my folks knew to do with me. This facility wasn't meant to handle opiate rehab, but that's where I went, and I wrote a lot of songs that wound up on *Sweet Baby James* there.

"Steamroller," however, was from my Flying Machine days, and it was a joke. There were a lot of white guys playing the blues, college students singing Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters, and it seemed comical to me. "Steamroller" was just meant to be a takeoff.

One of the effects of being hospitalized a couple of times is that any expectations my family might have had for me – academic or professional – had all been abandoned. They kinda threw up their hands and said, "Well, at least he's still alive." They were always very supportive of my music, but I did feel as though I came from a place of being disengaged and alienated. So while seeing *Sweet Baby James* take off was hugely gratifying and everything I wanted, success was a major adjustment.

You've Got a Friend 1971

Carole King and I were playing the Troubadour in Los Angeles together. She had just written "You've Got a Friend," which she later said was a response to "Fire and Rain." The chorus to "Fire and Rain" is "I've seen lonely times when I could not find a friend." Carole's response was,

"Ten critics might savage me, but I'll be fine as long as every once in a while someone like Bob Dylan or Paul McCartney says to me, 'Keep going, kid.'"

"Here's your friend." As soon as I heard it, I wanted to play it.

Not long after, we were in the studio recording [1971's] *Mud Slide Slim and the Blue Horizon*. We had already cut two songs that day, but we still had studio time and a lot of energy. Peter [Asher] said, "Well, why don't you play 'You've Got a Friend'?" We did, and it sounded great.

There was just one problem: I hadn't bothered to ask Carole if it was OK. I sheepishly called her up and said, "We didn't really mean to do it, but we've recorded 'You've Got a Friend,'" and she said, "Fine, go ahead, put it out," which was remarkably generous.

Walking Man 1974

I wrote a lot of songs about my dad. It's probably typical, but I have a sense that he was emotionally sort of frozen. "Walking Man" is informed by my longing for him. He disappeared for a few years when I was seven, eight and nine. He was drafted into the Navy, and then he volunteered to go to the South Pole. We missed him a lot. My mother was a daughter of a Yankee fisherman. She had five kids born within six years in the countryside of North Carolina, and here she was waiting for her husband to come home. That always stayed with me, somehow.

A Junkie's Lament 1976

I've got a lot of recovery songs. This one's a warning not to think of a junkie as a complete functioning human being. Heroin should've killed me about five times, but it never did. My kids suffered from their father being an addict. I think there's no way they can't.

People take drugs to be in control. They want to short-circuit any risk that they might take in life, any uncertainty, any anxiety. They just want to find the chemical route, to just push the button that gets the final result. So all of your relationships suffer, no question about it.

Secret o' Life 1977

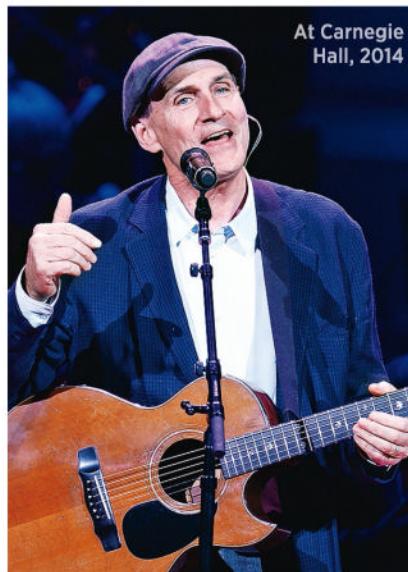
I wrote this in a little patch of sunlight while sitting on the stairs of a house I was literally building on Martha's Vineyard. It took me about 10 minutes. It's as though the song was just sitting there in the guitar. There aren't many that come that easily.

One line goes, "The secret of life is enjoying the passage of time." It's a preposterous thing to write about, and so the title

was supposed to recall Life Savers flavors – Pep-O-Mint or But-O-Rum. It's a jab at the presumptuousness of writing a song called "The Secret of Life."

Only a Dream in Rio 1985

I had gone into yet another rehab, to kick methadone after a couple of really nasty "jackpots," which is where you humiliate yourself and the people who love you by fucking up. I tried to detox at a place in Connecticut, but I fell back and contin-



ued to use. It wasn't until [saxophonist] Michael Brecker got me involved with the Twelve Steps that I got serious. But even after I got clean, I didn't know whether there was life on the other side of addiction for me. I wasn't sure I could write anymore, either.

Then I went down to Rio de Janeiro to play the Rock in Rio festival. [Brazilian songwriter] Gilberto Gil had left a guitar for me to play. I walked onstage, and 300,000 people knew my songs. They have this tradition of singing along in Brazil that is so loud, so strong, and so in tune and so in time, it's sort of like when they pick up a song that they know and sing it back to you, it's extremely powerful. So I was, like, two feet off the ground coming off the stage, really felt as though I had landed on my feet. It was a turning point in my life.

Never Die Young 1988

This song is written from the point of view of someone who has given up and is looking at the lives of two young people who

aren't caught up in the morass of life as the narrator knows it: "Let other hearts be broken/Let other dreams run dry/Let our golden ones sail onto another land beneath another sky." It's a sad song, but also hopeful and celebratory.

Copperline 1991

This is another song about home, about my father, about a childhood that was very peaceful, which is a rare thing today. I felt like I was part of a landscape in those days – the trees, the streams and the rivers, the animals that lived there.

[My wife] Kim and I are raising our kids in the countryside, but it is not the country life that I experienced. It's connected, constantly connected. Sometimes I feel as though the little snippets of information that we're always receiving are preparing us to have a hive mind. There may come a point where we basically have a communal mind, which is an exciting prospect.

Enough to Be on Your Way 1997

My brother Alex was also an addict, and in 1993, he died of it. There was a sense of relief when he died, for him and for his family, that one felt. It wasn't until a year or so had passed that I got back in touch with the totality of his life rather than just the shambles of its end, the pain of it. That's when I wrote this song.

Mean Old Man 2002

This one was a big accomplishment, because it's a sophisticated song and a throwback. Paul McCartney called me up and said that when he'd first heard it, he assumed it was Frank Loesser or Cole Porter. I was, of course, absolutely thrilled. At one point, Bob Dylan told me that he'd been listening to [Taylor's song] "Frozen Man" and really thought it was great, and that's enough for me. Ten critics can savage me, but I'll be fine as long as every once in a while, someone like Bob Dylan or Paul McCartney says, "Keep going, kid."

Angels of Fenway 2015

I finished this in May 2014, but I had the music for about seven years before that. I knew that I wanted to write about this miracle 2004 season against the Yankees. If you're a Red Sox fan, or even just a baseball fan, it was an amazing event. I cast it as a grandmother who was born the last time the Red Sox won, and she dies on the day they finally do it again.

Exploding the American Dream

Ta-Nehisi Coates wrestles with the nation's violent legacy in a powerful memoir

LAST YEAR, TA-NEHISI COATES wrote "The Case for Reparations," a painstakingly researched *Atlantic* cover story that confirmed him as one of the 21st century's most important writers on race. For his new book, *Between the World and Me*, he shifted tactics, exploring the impact of racist violence in America through an extraordinary blend of memoir and history. "I wanted to think about the problem from a more literary perspective," says Coates, 39. "I really wanted to make something beautiful." The book is especially timely this summer: Its release was moved up from September to July after the killings in Charleston, South Carolina, in June.

James Baldwin is one of the clearest influences on your writing in this book. When did you first read his work?

I have this fond memory of college – my time was unrestricted. I remember sitting in a library at Howard University and reading *The Fire Next Time* in one session. It was such a pleasurable experience, to be lost in a work of art. And in this age, where the Internet is ubiquitous, it's very hard to have that experience. I had this vision of some 19-year-old kid in a library somewhere, picking this book up and disappearing for a while. That was all I wanted.



TRUTH TO POWER
Coates has an unflinchingly dark vision of America.

One phrase that recurs throughout is "the Dream": the idea that America needs to wake up from the false dream of race. How did you come to that theme?

It's subverting the notion of the American Dream, subverting Martin Luther King's rendition of "I have a dream." I wanted to do something a little darker. It's no different than these movies where they say it's a darker version of some comic-book story. This is very much the same thing.

How much has hip-hop informed your writing?

It's the biggest influence on my aesthetic. One of the constant questions I get is "Why are you so depressing? What about hope?" But hope is not very important in hip-hop. Hope has very little to do with Mobb Deep. That shaped me a lot.

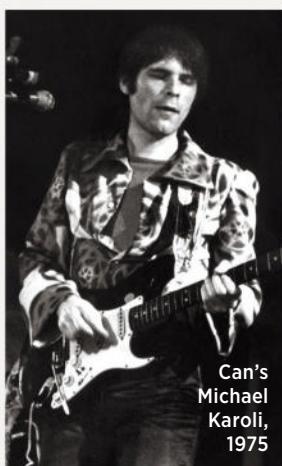
Do you find something positive in exploring that darkness, even if it's not hopeful?

There's hope in there. But it's not a bowl of sugar. It's dark chocolate. It's a little bitter. And that's how it's supposed to be. I think hope that's not cut with some sense of struggle is false. I'm not a fucking politician! I don't have to make people feel good at the end of the book.

"Forgiveness" is a word that's been thrown around since Charleston. What do you think of that concept?

I think it would be good if the country was as forgiving of the folks who were upset down in Ferguson; if the country was as forgiving of the people who were upset down in Baltimore; if the country was as forgiving of the millions of people who find themselves incarcerated in this country because of some mistake they made when they were young. Forgiveness is not just for white supremacists. Forgiveness is not just for Dylann Roof.

SIMON VOZICK-LEVINSON



INSIDE THE KRAUTROCK REVOLUTION

A history of a freaky, hugely influential Seventies music scene

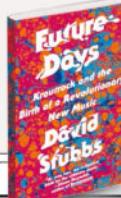
A pivotal influence on hip-hop, EDM and synth-pop, not to mention David Bowie and Brian Eno, the mysterious Sixties and Seventies German music dubbed krautrock has mainly remained a hipster reference point in the U.S. British music writer David Stubbs may change that with *Future Days: Krautrock and the Birth of a*

Revolutionary New Music. The hefty volume maps a freaky but fierce scene defined by radical beats and futuristic electronic soundscapes – a musical attempt at nothing less than a complete "re-establishment of cultural identity" after the horrors of World War II.

Among the book's stars are Kraftwerk, the only band of the era to break through in the U.S. (inspiring hip-hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa, among others), and Can,

art-funk adventurers committed to collective improvisation ("No one was allowed to become Führer!" the band's beat mastermind Jaki Liebezeit stresses).

Stubbs was especially surprised to find that even in its homeland, krautrock remains a secret history. "It was remarkable to walk around Cologne with [Liebezeit] – no one recognizes him," says the author. "They should erect a statue of the man." WILL HERMES





haveKINDLE willTRAVEL

@KDKUIPER, BANGKOK | Amazon asked if I'd bring the Kindle Paperwhite on my trip to Thailand. After wandering the crowded streets of Bangkok, I found my way to the floating market on the Chao Phraya river and got lost in the Sonchai Jitpleecheep series.

Follow more journeys on Instagram @AMAZONKINDLE



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Wireless Speakers Take Flight

After years of being a niche item, Bluetooth speakers are everywhere, from bedrooms to the beach. Now a new breed of wireless systems is pushing the technology (and volume levels) to new heights, offering rock-solid sound and an array of gee-whiz features, whether

you're updating your stereo system, building your own home theater or just jamming on the go. Want hi-fi sound without the cables and floor speakers? Need a speaker you can take on the Serengeti? Or just want something to charge your phone? Read on. **JOHN LONSDALE**



The Little Cube That Could

Mass Fidelity Core
From \$599

This 6x6x4-inch Bluetooth cube delivers full stereo sound for 12 hours per charge, pervading your room with its Wave Field Synthesis technology. One unit will cut it, but you can connect up to eight overall.



Supercharged Traveler

Braven 805
From \$200

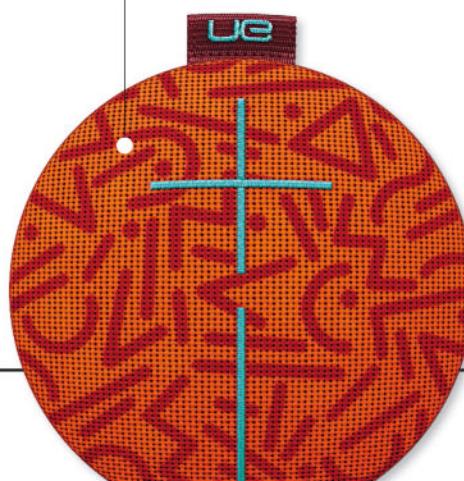
The 805 travels well – it can rock a party and charge your smartphone through its USB port at the same time – but it sounds good enough for your home. Pro move: Connect two 805s to produce big left-and-right stereo audio wherever you are.



Affordable Killer

UE Roll
From \$100

This small water-resistant Bluetooth speaker delivers surprisingly rich sound for the price, plus you can attach it to anything with its integrated bungee cord – and it looks great.



The Nouveau Standard

Devialet Phantom
From \$1,990

The price is no joke, but this rugby-ball-size, 750-watt French powerhouse can fill the great hall of your chateau in the Loire Valley with deep-bass thunder without breaking a sweat. You can play Spotify or Tidal playlists through its dedicated smartphone app, and expand it up to 24 units if you want to soak multiple rooms in champagne sound.



Indestructible Beats

Fugoo Tough XL
From \$330

The Fugoo Tough XL sports an impact-resistant outer cage protecting a sealed water- and sand-resistant main body. You can listen to its 360-degree sound for 35 hours per charge, and even put in a request to Siri or Google Now if you're somewhere with Wi-Fi. (But why would you be?) You can also buy a carrying strap. But its coolest trick? Drop it in three feet of water, and it will still play all day.

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those 2.5 paying jobs
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Jason Isbell's New Morning

The former Drive-By Trucker blew up his life – then became a master of Southern-gothic heartache By Patrick Doyle

JASON ISBELL FELT A RUSH OF familiarity when he watched the final episode of *Mad Men* on his tour bus. As he saw Don Draper go AWOL from his advertising job and embark on an aimless cross-country road trip, Isbell recalled his own life around 2008, after his first marriage had fallen apart and he'd been fired from the Drive-By Truckers due largely to his heavy drinking. Isbell bought a motorcycle and took off from his home in Alabama. "I drove down to Florida, back up through Georgia and visited some of the girls I had met on the road," he says in a husky Alabama drawl. "It's a wonder I didn't kill myself. I got home feeling and looking worse than when I'd left, just completely lost."

Isbell eventually went to rehab and turned his dark past into some of the best music to come out of Nashville this decade. On 2013's *Southeastern*, he reflected on cocaine nights at Super 8's, mistreating vulnerable women, and starting over. "I was behaving in a way that was deplorable on a lot of levels," Isbell says, drinking Red Bull and smoking cigarettes on his tour bus, outside the Capitol Theatre in Portchester, New York, one recent afternoon. "The problem with drinking is you can drown out your conscience until it shuts up." Bruce Springsteen called *Southeastern* a "lovely record" and sneaked up on Isbell at a Dr. John benefit to sing Isbell's song "Traveling Alone" into his ear. Isbell sold out four consecutive shows at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium in October.

"I'm kind of picky about songwriters, you know," says John Prine. "But when I heard *Southeastern*, it just killed me. I loved it. I like songs that are clean and don't have much fat on them – every line is direct, and all people can relate to it. That's what I try to do, and that's what Jason does. I really haven't heard anybody that different in probably 30 years."

Old ghosts still exist on Isbell's new album, *Something More Than Free*, like an ex-lover who spills unflattering stories about Isbell to his wife. But Isbell finds more material in the common truths of the overworked and underprivileged people of the rural South – truck loaders, railroad workers, housewives. "I don't think on why I'm here or where it hurts/I'm just



**CLEAR EYES,
FULL HEART**
Isbell in
Nashville
this year

lucky to have the work," he declares on the title track, which he wrote partly about his father, a retired house painter. "Physical labor, manual labor – if you can stay close to those folks, there's always plenty to write about, 'cause their issues are real issues."

Isbell grew up in the low-income town of Green Hill, Alabama. "People came to school [just] to eat lunch," he says. Green Hill is 20 miles from Muscle Shoals, where Aretha Franklin, Etta James, Percy Sledge and others did some of their best work. As a teenage guitarist, Isbell got to know many of the musicians on those records while sitting in at bars with bassist David Hood and organist Spooner Oldham.

As a student at the University of Memphis, Isbell made up songs to entertain his frat brothers and read original verse at poetry readings. One night, Isbell sat in with the Drive-By Truckers, a hard-living band led by Hood's son Patterson. The Truckers invited Isbell to join as a full member,

and he left on tour with them just two days later, becoming the third great voice in the group after Hood and Mike Cooley, who had just completed *Southern Rock Opera*, a concept album about Lynyrd Skynyrd. Isbell boiled down complex ideas into novelistic songs like "Decoration Day," a devastating chronicle of family/neighbor turmoil, and "Danko/Manuel," in which he compared his demons to those of two fallen members of the band.

Isbell had no problem adapting to the Truckers' lifestyle. He would wake up and start drinking, finishing off a fifth of Jack Daniel's by the end of a show. "We were lucky if we could walk off the stage," he says flatly. "I'd wake up in a lot of pain and not know where I was – some girl's house somewhere."

Isbell married bassist Shonna Tucker in 2002 after, he says, she saved his life one drunken night (she joined the band a year later). But the honeymoon didn't last long.

JASON ISBELL

"I slept with people I shouldn't have slept with," he says. "I started going outside the marriage." They separated – sort of. "We were still in the band together, and so we were only separated by the distance between those two bunks," he says. "She didn't deserve that, but I shouldn't have married her in the first place."

The toxic environment – combined with Isbell's explosive temper at the time – was too much for Hood and Cooley, who fired Isbell in 2007. (They've reconciled.) Isbell burned more bridges, lost more friends and recorded two albums with his band the 400 Unit. In 2011, he started seeing Amanda Shires, an old friend who had played fiddle and guitar with everyone from the Texas Playboys to Todd Snider. She had little tolerance for his excuses: "I told somebody in her presence, 'I don't drink in the morning,' and she said, 'Your morning is one in the afternoon. And you do drink at one in the afternoon.'" Shires and friend Ryan Adams convinced Isbell to go to rehab. "Rehab is like a divorce," he says. "The divorce isn't nearly as sad or shitty as the two or three years leading up to it."

After sobering up, Isbell started reading "big, thick books," including Gabriel García Márquez's *100 Years of Solitude*, Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries* and Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* – and dedicated six to eight hours a day to writing songs full of aphorisms like "There's one thing that's real clear to me/No one dies with dignity" and "Is your brother on a church kick? Seems like just a different kind of dope sick."

"A lot of people in Nashville think that the best song is the catchiest, or the one that sells the most copies," he says at one point. "They're editing songs in a way that make them seem more consumable, I guess. I'm trying to edit them in a way that makes them more honest."

One of those songs is a new single, "24 Frames," a searing account about how loss can upend one's world. "I still have the problem of thinking I'm in control of things I'm not in control of," he says. "No matter what you thought your plans were, that's not how things are going to work out, and that's the only way you can really, I think, live successfully."

Isbell takes a long drag off his last cigarette and cracks another Red Bull. "With karma too, it's like, 'What have I done to deserve this?' That's always the wrong question. It doesn't matter. The only right question is 'What do I do now?' That's it."



HOT SHOW

**WETTER,
HOTTER**
Amy Poehler
and Bradley
Cooper in the
Wet Hot TV
series

The Triumphant Second Life of a Cult Comedy

How 'Wet Hot American Summer' went from box-office flop to Netflix series

IN THE SUMMER OF 2001, A LOW-budget summer-camp comedy called *Wet Hot American Summer* hit theaters. Despite featuring a spate of future stars – including Bradley Cooper, Amy Poehler, Elizabeth Banks and Paul Rudd – the movie grossed less than \$300,000 and was torn to shreds by critics.

But just as it seemed like *Wet Hot American Summer* would be forgotten forever, young people everywhere fell in love with it. Midnight showings started popping up all over the country. "It became a thing where if you were on a date with somebody and they didn't like *Wet Hot*, you know it's not gonna go well," says the film's star and co-writer Michael Showalter. "It's filled with anti-humor, where the joke is there is no joke." Talk of a sequel began percolating, and Showalter and David Wain, the director and co-writer, approached Netflix about turning the film into a miniseries. "Netflix was emerging as a medium that wasn't quite a TV series, but not quite a feature film," says Wain. "It was the perfect wide canvas for us."

All of the original cast members returned for the eight-episode series (which premieres on Netflix on July 31st). This time, they were joined by newcomers Kristen Wiig, Michael Cera, "Weird Al" Yankovic, Lake Bell and Jason Schwartzman, as well as *Mad Men* vets Jon Hamm, John Slattery and Rich Sommer.

The original *Wet Hot* was shot at Camp Towanda in Honesdale, Pennsylvania; for the series, the camp was painstakingly re-created in Malibu. The film takes place on the last day of camp in 1981, but the show takes place entirely on the opening day that same summer. Many cast members are now in their forties, but most portray teenagers. "It adds a layer of comedy," says Wain. "You're only aware of it for the first couple of minutes of the show."

The show manages to be even more ridiculous than the movie, with a complex plot involving an undercover government assassin, an Israeli soccer coach and the origin story of the talking vegetable can from the film. "When the dust settles, we'll think about whether [we want to make another season]," says Wain. "Summer camp was a defining experience in my life, so I'm not surprised that there tend to be more places to go there." **ANDY GREENE**

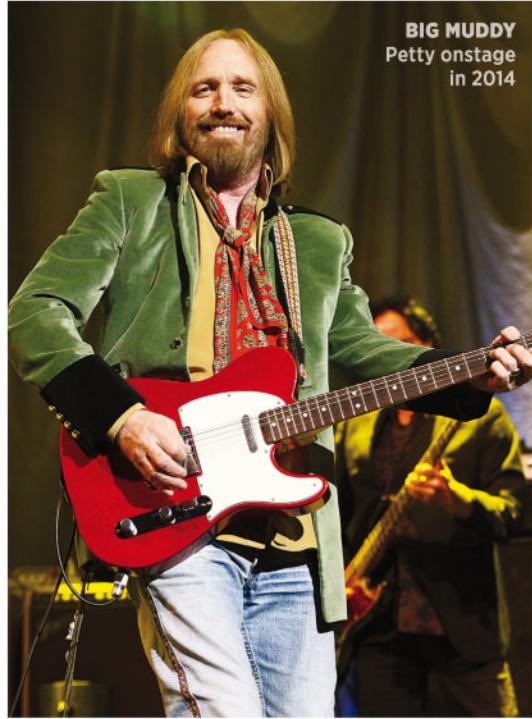


Rudd and
Marguerite
Moreau

Tom Petty Kick-Starts Mudcrutch Once More

Singer cuts new album with his pre-Heartbreakers crew and opens up his vault

IT'S BEEN SEVEN YEARS SINCE TOM Petty reassembled Mudcrutch, the short-lived band he formed in the early Seventies, years before finding fame with the Heartbreakers. Mudcrutch's self-titled 2008 debut ranks among Petty's best recent work. Now, he's readying a second Mudcrutch set. "I've spent the last month frantically working on material,"



BIG MUDDY
Petty onstage
in 2014

Petty says, noting he has four songs that he's happy with. "The good thing about Mudcrutch is that everyone brings in a song, so I don't have to write 12 or something. Following up the last one is intimidating because I think that's one of the better albums I was ever involved with."

Mudcrutch originally featured drummer Randall Marsh and rhythm guitarist Tom Leadon (brother of founding Eagles guitarist Bernie Leadon) alongside two future Heartbreakers, guitarist Mike Campbell and keyboard player Benmont Tench. The band first got together in 1970 in Petty's hometown of Gainesville, Florida,

then moved to Los Angeles, where it broke up in 1975 after releasing just one single.

"It's a totally different thing than the Heartbreakers," says Petty. "It's a different rhythm section and a different style of music. I play bass, which is a lot of fun for me, since I started out as a bass player. And Tommy is just out of sight on guitar. We spent our teenage years singing together, so we have a good blend."

The first Mudcrutch album was recorded in only two weeks. The group plans a similar straight-ahead process when it convenes in a Los Angeles studio later this summer to hammer out new material. Mudcrutch played a handful of successful California club dates in 2008, but this time out Petty hopes they'll tour more extensively.

"I'd love to get to the East Coast with it, too," he says. "Last time, we were under the gun because we had a big Heartbreakers tour coming up. Right now, I'm just writing, and I need to change my mindset from the Heartbreakers to that kind of music."

Petty thrilled fans two years ago when he played a series of theater shows in New York and Los Angeles packed with rarities and covers. "It changed my whole way of thinking about playing live," he says. "I'd love to do more theater shows, but it's complicated business-wise. I don't know for sure, but I would bet it costs us money. But I loved the freedom of it."

Also in the works is an album built around material Petty recorded for 1994's *Wildflowers*, the Rick Rubin-produced solo disc that remains one of his most beloved LPs. "It's not really a box set," he says of the release. "We have the second album of the double album that was originally made. We're going to put it out as its own album. It's sitting there finished. I'm just waiting to hear when they're gonna put it out."

In the meantime, Petty has no intention of recording another solo album in the foreseeable future. "There's nobody I'm longing to play with besides the Heartbreakers," he says, "so I just don't see the point of a solo record."

ANDY GREENE

Powley



MOVIES

SEX, DRUGS AND A BREAK-OUT STAR

How 'Diary of a Teenage Girl' made Bel Powley into a Hollywood It girl

British actress Bel Powley has appeared onscreen and onstage for a decade. But the 23-year-old's role in the widely acclaimed film *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* involved a "scary" first — a series of sex scenes with co-star Alexander Skarsgård. "I'd never even had an onscreen kiss before," she says, "let alone an onscreen shag. I was like, 'This is the worst idea in the world!'" By the time the film was finished, she'd shot eight of them — "including the lesbian sex scene."

In *Diary*, Powley stars as Minnie, a 15-year-old in 1970s San Francisco who worships Iggy Pop, drops acid and just happens to be sleeping with her mom's boyfriend. The film premiered at Sundance in January, earning a jury award and making Powley the It girl of the festival circuit.

At 13, she starred in *M.I. High*, a popular U.K. kids show, but she didn't see herself pursuing an acting career. That changed at 16, when playwright Polly Stenham cast her in a play at London's Royal Court Theatre. "It opened my eyes to all these strong women in this industry," Powley says.

She was especially drawn to *Diary's* matter-of-fact take on teenage sexuality. "There's no moral story coming away from it," says Powley, who has four more features in the works, including *Ashes in the Snow*, a World War II drama based on Ruta Sepetys' bestselling novel. "There's no life lesson to it. I desperately wanted to be part of that."

ELISABETH GARBER-PAUL

HOT SHOW

Brilliant, Funny and Totally Crass

How the Adult Swim hit 'Rick and Morty' became one of TV's best, and weirdest, shows

MOST SECOND ALBUMS SUCK," says Dan Harmon, lounging in a back room of a Burbank studio, across the table from Justin Roiland.

Roiland and Harmon are in the midst of creating not a second album but a second season. The show is Adult Swim's *Rick and Morty*, an animated sci-fi sitcom that's loosely based on *Back to the Future* and may be the best-written comedy on TV. In just 11 episodes, the show has become a ratings hit: All told, 9 million people watched Season One, and its fans include Matt Groening, who had Roiland and Harmon create a *Rick and Morty* couch gag for this season's finale of *The Simpsons*.

Rick and Morty chronicles the interdimensional adventures of an alcoholic, misanthropic scientific genius (Rick) and his big-hearted, dimwitted, chronically nervous grandson (Morty). With the show finally resuming after a 15-month gap, its creators are a bit nervous. The first new episode, Harmon confesses, "went off the deep end conceptually. We're pretty convinced it might be the worst episode."

If that's true, the pair have nothing to worry about. The episode begins with Rick freezing time for six months to clean up the house after a wild party. But due to an unforeseen complication, time keeps splitting into multiple simultaneous realities. The viewer's screen splits into as many as



GREAT SCOTT! Above: Rick (right) and Morty. Left: Harmon (left) and Roiland.

24 tiny frames, each with a slightly different version of the protagonists working to repair the rift.

Does this seem hard to follow? Welcome to the Michio Kaku world of *Rick and Morty*. "I consider it my job to service the insanity," Harmon says, referring to Roiland, who voices Rick and Morty. "I love the idea of serving the crazy guy instead of being the crazy guy."

Harmon has a reputation as a difficult genius. He's one of the few people who can create a great show and then get fired from it, as he did from *Community* and *The Sarah Silverman Program*. "I forgot my pain," he says. "I just move from one thing

to the next. If I remembered my pain, I'd stop working."

Rick and Morty's origins lie in a monthly short-film festival called Channel 101, which Harmon co-founded. It was there that Roiland debuted a "Doc and Mharti" short, which involved a mad scientist getting a young boy to lick his balls every time they encounter a problem.

Unsurprisingly, Roiland's sensibility made it difficult to sell shows to network TV. He pitched network executives nonstop for 10 years, with little luck. So when Adult Swim asked Harmon to make a pilot, he decided to work on making Roiland's humor palatable to a broader audience: "The challenge was, how do you make my mom understand how funny it is to see somebody vomiting diarrhea?" Harmon glances at his partner. "Not to pigeonhole Justin's sensibility."

NEIL STRAUSS

FROM TOP: ADULT SWIM; DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/GETTY IMAGES; GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

ROCK DOC

FLOATING ALONG WITH LEON RUSSELL

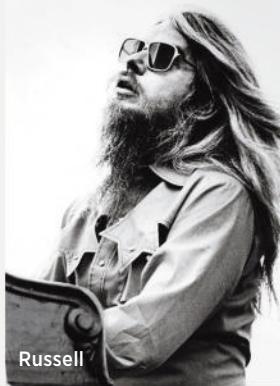
Lost documentary captured lakeside life of a Seventies eccentric

In 1972, Leon Russell went into a Nashville studio to record *Hank Wilson's Back*. Documentary filmmaker Les Blank chronicled the sessions for the album and spent two years at Russell's

lakeside compound in Oklahoma, taking a job at a place called Pappy Reeve's Floating Motel and Fish Camp while there. But the resulting film, *A Poem Is a Naked Person*, was rarely screened due to tensions between Russell and Blank, who died in 2013. ("I might have killed him," says Russell on why they didn't speak for decades.)

Now, 43 years later, the movie is finally being released. With cameos from George Jones and Willie Nelson, and plenty of live footage of Russell, it's a fascinating portrait of one of the Seventies' great eccentrics. "He was a collector of the unusual," Russell says of Blank. "Me being the prime unusual beast."

ERIK HYNES



Russell

Jason Segel

The comic actor on his most difficult role to date: troubled literary genius

David Foster Wallace By Brian Hiatt

IN HIS NEW MOVIE "THE END OF THE TOUR," Jason Segel plays the revered, troubled late author David Foster Wallace – a casting choice the media intelligentsia scrutinized like Comic-Con attendees fretting over Ben Affleck playing Batman. *Tour* is based on writer David Lipsky's *Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself*, with Jesse Eisenberg playing Lipsky, trailing Wallace on his *Infinite Jest* book tour for a never-published ROLLING STONE profile. "The first viewing was scary," says Segel, 35, who's getting Oscar buzz for the role. "Coming from comedy into a movie like this – just as a body rejects a perfectly good organ – no matter how well I did, people could just decide, 'Nope!' Luckily when I watched it, that didn't happen."

What's it like playing someone who's probably much smarter than you?

Oh, it's not probably. David Foster Wallace is definitely smarter than me [*laughs*]. I think the verdict is in on that one.

Then again, he didn't come up with Miss Piggy's doppelgänger, Miss Poogy. That was you.

Yeah, I guess I have a certain bizarre intelligence [*laughs*]. But the real challenge is that Wallace is constantly aware of what everybody in the room is trying to do, but he's also a guy who wants to feel like everyone else, a guy using whatever mental gymnastics he has at his disposal to feel at one with his fellow man.

What were you told about why the director, James Ponsoldt, wanted you for this role?

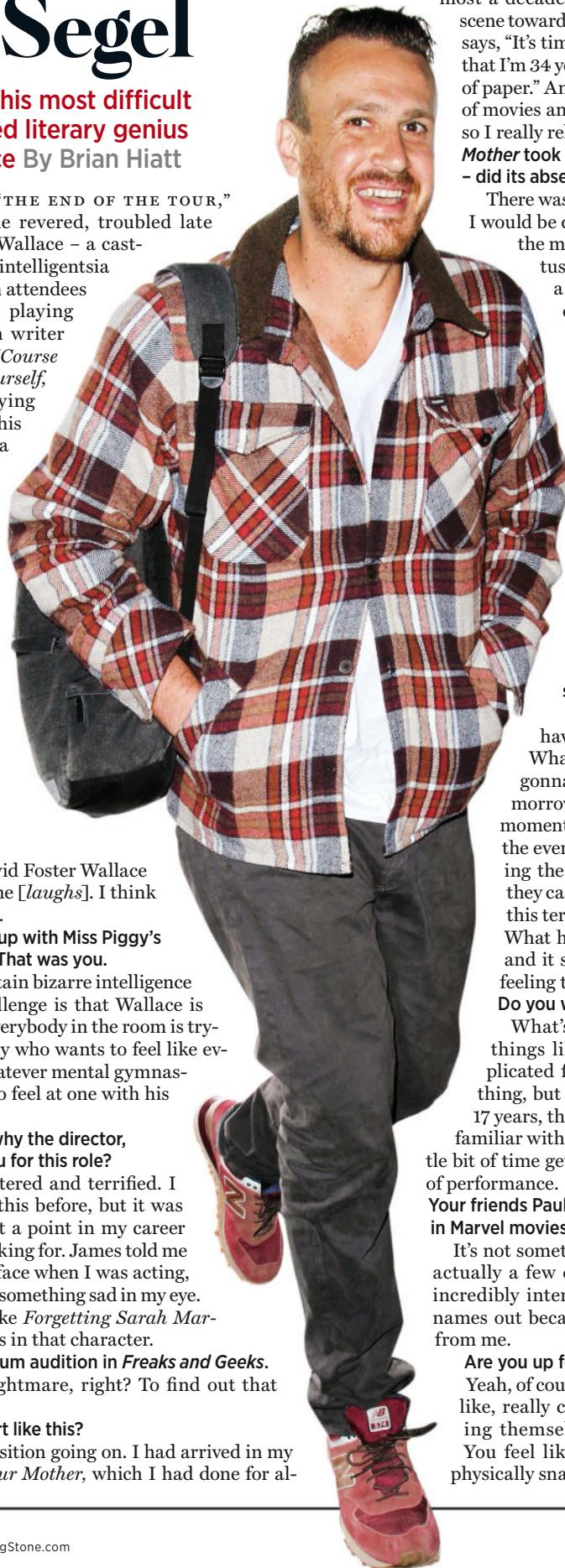
I was surprised and flattered and terrified. I hadn't done anything like this before, but it was a strange kismet – I was at a point in my career where this is what I was looking for. James told me that when he looked at my face when I was acting, even in a comedy, there was something sad in my eye. If you look at something like *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, there's a lot of sadness in that character.

Or even that tragic failed drum audition in *Freaks and Geeks*.

That's like the worst nightmare, right? To find out that you're medium talent.

Why were you seeking a part like this?

There was a natural transition going on. I had arrived in my thirties, and *How I Met Your Mother*, which I had done for al-



most a decade, was coming to an end. There's a scene toward the end of this movie where Wallace says, "It's time for me to acknowledge the reality that I'm 34 years old, alone in a room with a piece of paper." And I was coming out of a long tunnel of movies and TV shows into the unknown, and so I really related to that.

Mother took up so much of your time for so long – did its absence lead to a lot of introspection?

There was a repetitive cycle for about 10 years. I would be doing the TV show and also writing the movie that I would do during the hiatus and then filming that. There wasn't a lot of opportunity to think about doing something different. Then all of a sudden, I had the chance to think about what I wanted the next 50 years of my life to be like. **Bob Odenkirk sometimes gets funny takes out of his system before he gets serious – did you try that?**

I was too scared to try funny takes! In a movie this size, you really don't have the time or the film – literally the film – to ease yourself in. And I didn't want it to ever feel like, "Now watch Jason Segel try dramatic acting!"

How did you incorporate your knowledge of Wallace's eventual suicide into the performance?

It's a good question, because you have some options on how to play it. What really hit me is I don't know what's gonna happen to me, to Jason Segel, tomorrow. So I tried to play it as much in the moment as possible, and not try to indicate the eventuality of it. At the same time, during the movie, things are going as well as they can go for him, and underneath it all is this terrifying moment we can all relate to: What happens when things are going well and it still doesn't satisfy this sort of deep feeling that we're not enough?

Do you want to leave comedy behind?

What's interesting to me right now are things like *End of Tour* that explore complicated feelings. There's room to do everything, but I'm also aware, after doing this for 17 years, that people want more of what they're familiar with you doing – so I want to spend a little bit of time getting people familiar with this type of performance.

Your friends Paul Rudd and Cobie Smulders are both in Marvel movies. Would you consider that?

It's not something I'm seeking out, but there are actually a few comic-book characters that I find incredibly interesting – I would never throw the names out because then they'll get snatched away from me.

Are you up for the getting-super-ripped part?

Yeah, of course. But it's unbelievable – you have, like, really complicated, sensitive artists treating themselves like UFC fighters. [*Laughs*] You feel like at some point somebody might physically snap.



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Is There Anyone Left to Trust?

At the end of one of the all-time great TV runs, Jon Stewart just couldn't take it anymore

By Rob Sheffield

AMERICA WILL MISS Jon Stewart. But it's fair to say we miss him already, because his America is gone. The political climate – angrier, more bitter, more violently divided – is radically

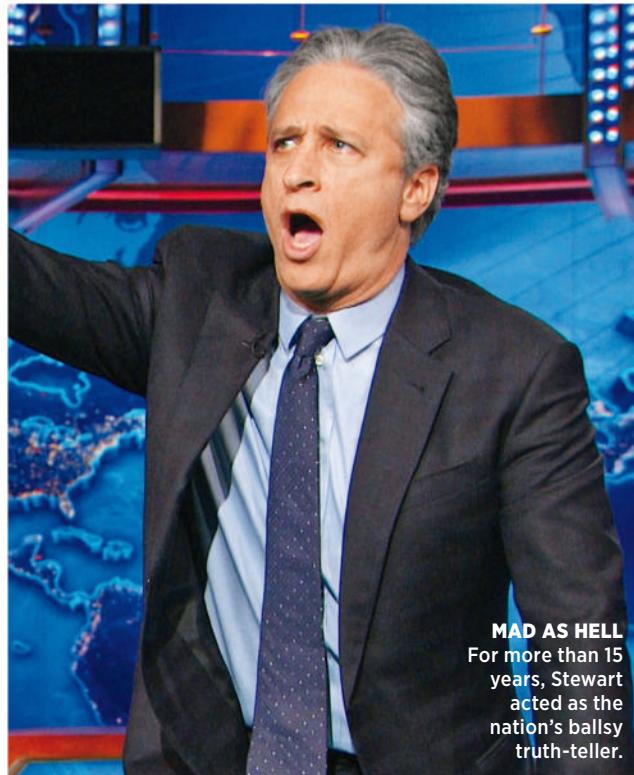
The Daily Show

Weeknights, 11 p.m.,
Comedy Central

different from the one he signed up to make fun of. Political satire, as Stewart defined it on *The Daily Show*, requires him to appear equally tough on the left and the right. But that means he has to pretend there's such a thing as a moderate center.

If his show got more predictable in the past few years – making the same jokes every night about the same Fox News/Tea Party bullshit – that's because America did too. And it clearly took a toll on him. "Watching these channels all day is incredibly depressing," he said recently. "I live in a constant state of depression."

Stewart was a strange fit for *The Daily Show*, an already thriving franchise when he took over in 1999. His specialty was a sort of good-natured bro humor. He didn't do topical material. He looked uncomfortable in a suit and tie. If he'd ever had a political opinion, he kept it to himself. The transition was clumsier than anyone wants to remember. But there was a moment, early on in those first few months, when you could see things change – in retrospect, this was one of the pivot points of 21st-century TV culture. Stewart was doing a bit about the NYPD – then wracked by a scandal in which at least one cop sexually assaulted and tortured a black man with a toilet plunger – and its "CPR" motto: "Courtesy, Professionalism,



MAD AS HELL
For more than 15 years, Stewart acted as the nation's ballsy truth-teller.

Respect." Stewart said, "Although many officers tragically mistake it for 'Cram Plunger in Rectum.'"

Then he winced – not a comedian's wince, not a jokey "sorry, folks" wince, just a reflexive flinch that said, "Wow, that was not fun at all." You could see he hated himself for

that line, hated the handful of people in the audience who laughed – and was already telling himself, "Yeah, this is exactly what I'm *not* doing from now on."

That's the moment when *The Daily Show* became unlike anything else on TV before or since. After 9/11 scared

the media into shutting up and cheerleading for whatever war in whatever country as long as it's not here, Stewart turned *The Daily Show* into the crucial news source in the Bush years. Though he often claimed he was just a comedian making jokes, he clearly relished his newfound role as the ballsy truth-teller puncturing the official lies of the day.

It looked like Stewart was building a lasting legacy. So it's perhaps strange that he doesn't have a clear successor. When he signs off, there won't be other Jon Stewarts out there to continue the kind of political argument he brought to the airwaves. Especially, it seems, on *The Daily Show*, where Stewart's successor, Trevor Noah, hired in a bizarrely rushed fit of corporate despair, already seems like the wrong man for the job.

Comedy Central honchos clearly saw Noah as a blank slate, without any partisan baggage. But they got caught with their pants down when the world found out about his shockingly lame taste in "edgy" quips, which were offensive mostly for being older than Don Rickles' mother. (Dude was still doing "Beats by Dreidel" jokes in 2014?) This is a grown man who proudly told a joke about how Thai hookers are cheaper than fast food, so he might order a "Quarter Poundher Deluxe."

Noah made a bad impression worse by saying, "To reduce my views to a handful of jokes that didn't land is not a true reflection of my character" – the exact kind of chickenshit non-statement Stewart would have ripped apart, if it hadn't been about his own show.

It'll be an uglier world without Stewart – but then, that's the main reason he's bailing: It's an uglier world already. So you have to suspect Stewart doesn't care all that deeply whether *The Daily Show* can carry on without him. It looks like he's more worried about whether America can carry on at all.

SHORT TAKE

New York's Spite Club

Difficult People

Hulu

Before there was warm and fuzzy New York, there was rude and unbearable New York – the town *Difficult People* proudly calls home. Executive-produced by Amy Poehler, it's the adventures of two BFFs doing what they can to make city life more miserable. Julie Klausner comes on like Larry David in *Ann-Margret* drag, while Billy Eichner earns a first-ballot spot in the Eyeroll Hall of Fame. When he's asked why he doesn't know how to use a power drill, he snaps, "My father is dead. And before that, he was Jewish."



Eichner and Klausner

He's a waiter, she's a TV recapper. They're underemployed and underlaid – but never unfriended, because they have each other to complain to (and about). Their toxic chemistry is gasp-for-oxygen funny.

R.S.



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"If a rock star sticks his wang in a bagel, it sells on eBay." —Courtney Love, on Ariana Grande's doughnut-licking scandal

Random Notes



Unchained!

"Ed gets 'em in the tent," says David Lee Roth of Van Halen's current tour. "I sell 'em the Bibles!" Bassist Wolfie Van Halen planned the set list for the band's Irvine, California, show ("Y'all are gonna flip," he tweeted beforehand), dropping in deep cuts such as 1984's "Drop Dead Legs" and *Van Halen II*'s "Light Up the Sky" alongside classics like "Beautiful Girls" and "Hot for Teacher."

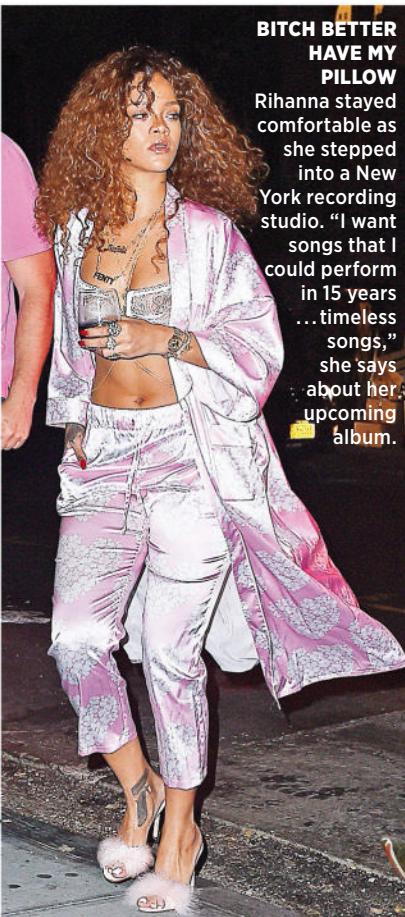


City of Blinding Lights

At the first night of U2's eight-show run at Madison Square Garden, Bono looked back at their early New York gigs. "When we first played a club called the Ritz in this great city, we thought of ourselves as a great punk band," he said. "We still do." They backed that up with a torrid set including their first performance of "October" in 26 years, new peaks like "Every Breaking Wave," and a tribute to Charleston and Ferguson. "Dr. King, we need you more than ever," Bono said.



FOX NEWS
Brian May led a rally opposing a proposal that would relax Britain's fox-hunting laws. He's called supporters of the plan "a bunch of lying bastards."



BITCH BETTER HAVE MY PILLOW
Rihanna stayed comfortable as she stepped into a New York recording studio. "I want songs that I could perform in 15 years ...timeless songs," she says about her upcoming album.



TOP BALLER
At a celebrity all-star game in Cincinnati, Snoop Dogg stole bases and argued an umpire's call (and won!).

CAN'T HOLD HIM
MVP Macklemore scraped his shin while sliding into third.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: KEVIN MASTRUD/WIREIMAGE; DAVID YOUNG/USA TODAY SPORTS/SIPA
USA: STEPHEN J. COHEN/WIREIMAGE; JEFF MELFONYNET PICTURES; STUART C. WILSON/GETTY IMAGES



WELCOME BACK, KID

Former Mouseketeer Britney Spears spent three straight days at Disneyland, calling it "the happiest place on Earth."



THOM-THOM CLUB

Thom Yorke played a surprise set at U.K.'s Latitude fest, performing unreleased tracks and cuts from last year's *Tomorrow's Modern Boxes*.



THROWBACK Mick's son James Jagger relaxed on the set of a Martin Scorsese-directed HBO drama about New York in the Seventies, in which Jagger plays a punk-band frontman.



SUMMERTIME GLADNESS Lana Del Rey - who just released the wistful title track from her upcoming LP *Honeymoon* - stepped out for brunch in L.A.



ACTION-PACKED A Clockwork Orange-dressed character crashed Action Bronson's set at London's Lovebox fest - and Bronson punched him in the face.

INDEPENDENT WOMEN Joan Jett, Melissa Etheridge and Debbie Harry caught up before sharing a bill in Spokane, Washington. "This was just rock & roll at its best," says Etheridge.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: FERIN/SHARPSHOOTER IMAGES/SPLASH NEWS; MANIK (NYC) SPLASH NEWS; LARRY BUSACCA/LIPS/GETTY IMAGES FOR TBS; SIEBEL ENGELMAN/JOSEPH JOSEPH/REDFERNS; GENE REX SHUTTERSTOCK; BOBBY DANK/GC IMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

Swift's Champion Squad

Taylor Swift has welcomed some big guests onstage for her *1989* stadium tour (Lorde, Nick Jonas, Sam Hunt). But her biggest coup so far was enlisting the U.S. Women's World Cup champion soccer team to walk the runway during "Style" (along with, um, Heidi Klum, far right). After the New Jersey show, the team bestowed Swift with her own jersey (No. 13, of course). "I love them, and they are the nicest," she said.





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THEY ARE THE WALRUS With sea ice vanishing, walruses, like these in Alaska, are being forced ashore in record numbers.

THE POINT OF NO RETURN

The worst predicted impacts of climate change are starting to happen – and much faster than climate scientists expected

★ By Eric Holthaus ★

HISTORIANS MAY LOOK TO 2015 as the year when shit really started hitting the fan. Some snapshots: In just the past few months, record-setting heat waves in Pakistan and India each killed more than 1,000 people. In Washington state's Olympic National Park, the rainforest caught fire for the first time in living memory. London reached 98 degrees Fahrenheit during the hottest July day ever recorded in the U.K.; *The Guardian* briefly had to pause its live blog of the heat wave because its computer servers overheated. In California, suffering from its worst drought in a millennium, a 50-acre brush fire swelled seventy-fold in a matter of hours, jumping across the I-15 freeway during rush-hour traffic. Then, a few days later, the region was pounded by intense, virtually unheard-of summer rains. Puerto Rico is under

its strictest water rationing in history as a monster El Niño forms in the tropical Pacific Ocean, shifting weather patterns worldwide.

On July 20th, James Hansen, the former NASA climatologist who brought climate change to the public's attention in the summer of 1988, issued a bombshell: He and a team of climate scientists had identified a newly important feedback mechanism off the coast of Antarctica that suggests mean sea levels could rise 10 times faster than previously predicted: 10 feet by 2065. The authors included this chilling warning: If emissions aren't cut, "We conclude that multi-meter sea-level rise would become practically unavoidable. Social disruption and economic consequences of such large sea-level rise could be devastating. It is not difficult to imagine that conflicts arising from forced migrations and economic collapse might make the planet ungovernable, threatening the fabric of civilization."

Eric Rignot, a climate scientist at NASA and the University of California-Irvine and a co-author on Hansen's study, said their

new research doesn't necessarily change the worst-case scenario on sea-level rise, it just makes it much more pressing to think about and discuss, especially among world leaders. In particular, says Rignot, the new research shows a two-degree Celsius rise in global temperature – the previously agreed upon "safe" level of climate change – "would be a catastrophe for sea-level rise."

Hansen's new study also shows how complicated and unpredictable climate change can be. Even as global ocean temperatures rise to their highest levels in recorded history, some parts of the ocean, near where ice is melting exceptionally fast, are actually cooling, slowing ocean circulation currents and sending weather patterns into a frenzy. Sure enough, a persistently cold patch of ocean is starting to show up just south of Greenland, exactly where previous experimental predictions of a sudden surge of freshwater from melting ice expected it to be. Michael Mann, another prominent climate scientist, recently said of the unexpectedly sudden At-

lantic slowdown, "This is yet another example of where observations suggest that climate model predictions may be too conservative when it comes to the pace at which certain aspects of climate change are proceeding."

Since storm systems and jet streams in the United States and Europe partially draw their energy from the difference in ocean temperatures, the implication of one patch of ocean cooling while the rest of the ocean warms is profound. Storms will get stronger, and sea-level rise will accelerate. Scientists like Hansen only expect extreme weather to get worse in the years to come, though Mann said it was still "unclear" whether recent severe winters on the East Coast are connected to the phenomenon.

hour near the Farallon Islands – enough to issue a boating warning. Humpbacks are occasionally seen offshore in California, but rarely so close to the coast or in such numbers. Why are they coming so close to shore? Exceptionally warm water has concentrated the krill and anchovies they feed on into a narrow band of relatively cool coastal water. The whales are having a heyday. "It's unbelievable," Thomas told a local paper. "Whales are all over the place."

Last fall, in northern Alaska, in the same part of the Arctic where Shell is planning to drill for oil, federal scientists discovered 35,000 walruses congregating on a single beach. It was the largest-ever documented "haul out" of walruses, and a sign that sea ice, their favored habitat, is

he uses to forecast the return of salmon. What he's been seeing this year is deeply troubling.

Salmon are crucial to their coastal ecosystem like perhaps few other species on the planet. A significant portion of the nitrogen in West Coast forests has been traced back to salmon, which can travel hundreds of miles upstream to lay their eggs. The largest trees on Earth simply wouldn't exist without salmon.

But their situation is precarious. This year, officials in California are bringing salmon downstream in convoys of trucks, because river levels are too low and the temperatures too warm for them to have a reasonable chance of surviving. One species, the winter-run Chinook salmon, is at a particularly increased risk of decline in

“ONE TEXAS CLIMATE SCIENTIST HAS AN EXIT STRATEGY FOR HER FAMILY: IF WE CONTINUE ON OUR CURRENT PATH, CANADA WILL BE HOME FOR US LONG TERM.”

And yet, these aren't even the most disturbing changes happening to the Earth's biosphere that climate scientists are discovering this year. For that, you have to look not at the rising sea levels but to what is actually happening within the oceans themselves.

WATER TEMPERATURES THIS year in the North Pacific have never been this high for this long over such a large area – and it is already having a profound effect on marine life.

Eighty-year-old Roger Thomas runs whale-watching trips out of San Francisco. On an excursion earlier this year, Thomas spotted 25 humpbacks and three blue whales. During a survey on July 4th, federal officials spotted 115 whales in a single

becoming harder and harder to find.

Marine life is moving north, adapting in real time to the warming ocean. Great white sharks have been sighted breeding near Monterey Bay, California, the farthest north that's ever been known to occur. A blue marlin was caught last summer near Catalina Island – 1,000 miles north of its typical range. Across California, there have been sightings of non-native animals moving north, such as Mexican red crabs.

No species may be as uniquely endangered as the one most associated with the Pacific Northwest, the salmon. Every two weeks, Bill Peterson, an oceanographer and senior scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Northwest Fisheries Science Center in Oregon, takes to the sea to collect data

the next few years, should the warm water persist offshore.

"You talk to fishermen, and they all say: 'We've never seen anything like this before,'" says Peterson. "So when you have no experience with something like this, it gets like, 'What the hell's going on?'"

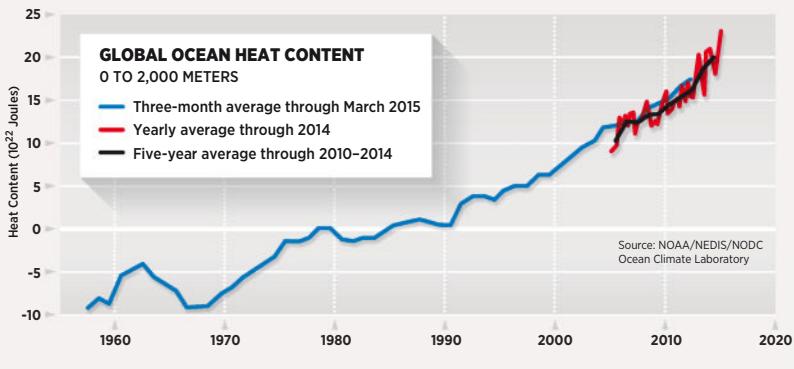
Atmospheric scientists increasingly believe that the exceptionally warm waters over the past months are the early indications of a phase shift in the Pacific Decadal Oscillation, a cyclical warming of the North Pacific that happens a few times each century. Positive phases of the PDO have been known to last for 15 to 20 years, during which global warming can increase at double the rate as during negative phases of the PDO. It also makes big El Niños, like this year's, more likely. The nature of

THREAT ASSESSMENT THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE SCARY



IN VERY HOT WATER

More than 90 percent of the heat trapped by greenhouse gases over the past several decades has been stored in the seas, and it appears to be accelerating. This chart represents the amount of energy trapped in the oceans. For perspective, 25×10^{22} joules (the top of the chart) is about 500 times as much energy as all the humans on Earth consume each year. That shows you the power of the greenhouse effect: The carbon dioxide we emit ends up trapping heat from the sun with terrifying efficiency.



PDO phase shifts is unpredictable – climate scientists simply haven't yet figured out precisely what's behind them and why they happen when they do. It's not a permanent change – the ocean's temperature will likely drop from these record highs, at least temporarily, some time over the next few years – but the impact on marine species will be lasting, and scientists have pointed to the PDO as a global-warming preview.

"The climate [change] models predict this gentle, slow increase in temperature," says Peterson, "but the main problem we've had for the last few years is the variability is so high. As scientists, we can't keep up with it, and neither can the animals." Peterson likens it to a boxer getting pummeled round after round: "At some point, you knock them down, and the fight is over."

ATTENDANT WITH THIS WEIRD wildlife behavior is a stunning drop in the number of plankton – the basis of the ocean's food chain. In July, another major study concluded that acidifying oceans are likely to have a "quite traumatic" impact on plankton diversity, with some species dying out while others flourish. As the oceans absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, it's converted into carbonic acid – and the pH of seawater declines. According to lead author Stephanie Dutkiewicz of MIT, that trend means "the whole food chain is going to be different."

The Hansen study may have gotten more attention, but the Dutkiewicz study, and others like it, could have even more dire implications for our future. The rapid changes Dutkiewicz and her colleagues are observing have shocked

some of their fellow scientists into thinking that yes, actually, we're heading toward the worst-case scenario. Unlike a prediction of massive sea-level rise just decades away, the warming and acidifying oceans represent a problem that seems to have kick-started a mass extinction on the same time scale.

Jacquelyn Gill is a paleoecologist at the University of Maine. She knows a lot about extinction, and her work is more relevant than ever. Essentially, she's trying to save the species that are alive right now by learning more about what killed off the ones that aren't. The ancient data she studies shows "really compelling evidence that there can be events of abrupt climate change that can happen well within human life spans. We're talking less than a decade."

FOR THE PAST YEAR OR TWO, A persistent change in winds over the North Pacific has given rise to what meteorologists and oceanographers are calling "the blob" – a highly anomalous patch of warm water between Hawaii, Alaska and Baja California that's thrown the marine ecosystem into a tailspin. Amid warmer temperatures, plankton numbers have plummeted, and the myriad species that depend on them have migrated or seen their own numbers dwindle.

Significant northward surges of warm water have happened before, even frequently. El Niño, for example, does this on a predictable basis. But what's happening this year appears to be something new. Some climate scientists think that the wind shift is linked to the rapid decline in Arctic sea ice over the past few years, which separate research has shown makes weather patterns more likely to get stuck.

A similar shift in the behavior of the jet stream has also contributed to the Califor-



1. HIGHWAYS ON FIRE IN L.A.



3. PAVEMENT-MELTING HEAT WAVES IN INDIA



2. SALMON ON THE BRINK OF DYING OUT



4. BIBLICAL FLOODS IN TURKEY



IS THIS WHAT THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO LOOKS LIKE?

Around the world, extreme weather is wreaking havoc. The escalating atmospheric chaos raises questions about where we are on the projected global-warming timeline. The examples from this summer alone tell a chilling story. Evidence from torqued weather patterns and fundamental changes in the ocean's chemistry point toward the increasing likelihood that we've entered what was previously considered unthinkable: a period of rapid climate change that could threaten society itself.

nia drought and severe polar vortex winters in the Northeast over the past two years. An amplified jet-stream pattern has produced an unusual doldrum off the West Coast that's persisted for most of the past 18 months. Daniel Swain, a Stanford University meteorologist, has called it the "Ridiculously Resilient Ridge" – weather patterns just aren't supposed to last this long.

What's increasingly uncontroversial among scientists is that in many ecosystems, the impacts of the current off-the-charts temperatures in the North Pacific will linger for years, or longer. The largest ocean on Earth, the Pacific is exhibiting cyclical variability to greater extremes than other ocean basins. While the North Pacific is currently the most dramatic area of change in the world's oceans, it's not alone: Globally, 2014 was a record-

setting year for ocean temperatures, and 2015 is on pace to beat it soundly, boosted by the El Niño in the Pacific. Six percent of the world's reefs could disappear before the end of the decade, perhaps permanently, thanks to warming waters.

Since warmer oceans expand in volume, it's also leading to a surge in sea-level rise. One recent study showed a slowdown in Atlantic Ocean currents, perhaps linked to glacial melt from Greenland, that caused a four-inch rise in sea levels along the Northeast coast in just two years, from 2009 to 2010. To be sure, it seems like this sudden and unpredicted surge was only temporary, but scientists who studied the surge estimated it to be a 1-in-850-year event, and it's been blamed on accelerated beach erosion "almost as significant as some hurricane events."

Possibly worse than rising ocean temperatures is the acidification of the waters. Acidification has a direct effect on mollusks and other marine animals with hard outer bodies: A striking study last year showed that, along the West Coast, the shells of tiny snails are already dissolving, with as-yet-unknown consequences on the ecosystem. One of the study's authors, Nina Bednaršek, told *Science* magazine that the snails' shells, pitted by the acidifying ocean, resembled "cauliflower" or "sandpaper." A similarly striking study by more than a dozen of the world's top ocean scientists this July said that the current pace of increasing carbon emissions would force an "effectively irreversible" change on ocean ecosystems during this century. In as little as a decade, the study suggested, chemical changes will rise significantly above

background levels in nearly half of the world's oceans.

"I used to think it was kind of hard to make things in the ocean go extinct," James Barry of the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute in California told the *Seattle Times* in 2013. "But this change we're seeing is happening so fast it's almost instantaneous."

THANKS TO THE PRESSURE we're putting on the planet's ecosystem – warming, acidification and good old-fashioned pollution – the oceans are set up for several decades of rapid change. Here's what could happen next.

The combination of excessive nutrients from agricultural runoff, abnormal wind patterns and the warming oceans is already creating seasonal dead zones in coastal regions when algae blooms suck up most of the available oxygen. The appearance of low-oxygen regions has doubled in frequency every 10 years since 1960 and should continue to grow over the coming decades at an even greater rate.

So far, dead zones have remained mostly close to the coasts, but in the 21st century, deep-ocean dead zones could become common. These low-oxygen regions could gradually expand in size – potentially thousands of miles across – which would force fish, whales, pretty much everything upward. If this were to occur, large sections of the temperate deep oceans would suffer should the oxygen-free layer grow so pronounced that it stratifies, pushing surface ocean warming into overdrive and hindering upwelling of cooler, nutrient-rich deeper water.

Enhanced evaporation from the warmer oceans will create heavier downpours, perhaps destabilizing the root systems of forests, and accelerated runoff will pour more excess nutrients into coastal areas, further enhancing dead zones. In the past year, downpours have broken records in Long Island, Phoenix, Detroit, Baltimore, Houston and Pensacola, Florida.

Evidence for the above scenario comes in large part from our best understanding of what happened 250 million years ago, during the "Great Dying," when more than 90 percent of all oceanic species perished after a pulse of carbon dioxide and methane from land-based sources began a period of profound climate change. The conditions that triggered "Great Dying" took hundreds of thousands of years to develop. But humans have been emitting carbon dioxide at a much quicker rate, so the current mass extinction only took 100 years or so to kick-start.

With all these stressors working against it, a hypoxic feedback loop could wind up destroying some of the oceans' most species-rich ecosystems within our lifetime. A recent study by Sarah Moffitt of the University of California-Davis said it could take the ocean thousands of years to recover. "Looking forward for my kid, people in the future are not going to have the same ocean that I have today," Moffitt said.

AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT, HAVING tickets to the front row of a global environmental catastrophe is taking an increasingly emotional toll on scientists, and in some cases pushing them toward advocacy. Of the two dozen or so scientists I interviewed for this piece, virtually all drifted into apocalyptic language at some point.

For Simone Alin, an oceanographer focusing on ocean acidification at NOAA's Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory in Seattle, the changes she's seeing hit

“ALONG THE WEST COAST, OCEAN ACIDIFICATION IS DISSOLVING THE SHELLS OF MOLLUSKS AND OTHER MARINE ANIMALS WITH HARD OUTER BODIES.”

close to home. The Puget Sound is a natural laboratory for the coming decades of rapid change because its waters are naturally more acidified than most of the world's marine ecosystems.

The local oyster industry here is already seeing serious impacts from acidifying waters and is going to great lengths to avoid a total collapse. Alin calls oysters, which are non-native, the canary in the coal mine for the Puget Sound: "A canary is also not native to a coal mine, but that doesn't mean it's not a good indicator of change."

Though she works on fundamental oceanic changes every day, the Dutkiewicz study on the impending large-scale changes to plankton caught her off-guard: "This was alarming to me because if the basis of the food web changes, then... everything could change, right?"

Alin's frank discussion of the looming oceanic apocalypse is perhaps a product of studying unfathomable change every day. But four years ago, the birth of her twins "heightened the whole issue," she says. "I was worried enough about these problems before having kids that I maybe wondered

whether it was a good idea. Now, it just makes me feel crushed."

Katharine Hayhoe, a climate scientist and evangelical Christian, moved from Canada to Texas with her husband, a pastor, precisely because of its vulnerability to climate change. There, she engages with the evangelical community on science – almost as a missionary would. But she's already planning her exit strategy: "If we continue on our current pathway, Canada will be home for us long term. But the majority of people don't have an exit strategy.... So that's who I'm here trying to help."

James Hansen, the dean of climate scientists, retired from NASA in 2013 to become a climate activist. But for all the gloom of the report he just put his name to, Hansen is actually somewhat hopeful. That's because he knows that climate change has a straightforward solution: End fossil-fuel use as quickly as possible. If tomorrow, the leaders of the United States and China would agree to a sufficiently

strong, coordinated carbon tax that's also applied to imports, the rest of the world would have no choice but to sign up. This idea has already been pitched to Congress several times, with tepid bipartisan support. Even though a carbon tax is probably a long shot, for Hansen, even the slim possibility that bold action like this might happen is enough for him to devote the rest of his life to working to achieve it. On a conference call with reporters in July, Hansen said a potential joint U.S.-China carbon tax is more important than whatever happens at the United Nations climate talks in Paris.

One group Hansen is helping is Our Children's Trust, a legal advocacy organization that's filed a number of novel challenges on behalf of minors under the idea that climate change is a violation of intergenerational equity – children, the group argues, are lawfully entitled to inherit a healthy planet.

A separate challenge to U.S. law is being brought by a former EPA scientist arguing that carbon dioxide isn't just a pollutant (which, under the Clean Air Act, can dissipate on its own), it's also a toxic substance. In general, these substances have exceptionally long life spans in the environment, cause an unreasonable risk, and therefore require remediation. In this case, remediation may involve planting vast numbers of trees or restoring wetlands to bury excess carbon underground.

Even if these novel challenges succeed, it will take years before a bend in the curve is noticeable. But maybe that's enough. When all feels lost, saving a few species will feel like a triumph. ☀

KEVIN HART'S FUNNY BUSINESS

*By JONAH
WEINER*

Call him adorable, raunchy, shameless – just make sure you also call him stand-up's first mogul

PROCEED PAST A TAN STUCCO SECURITY BOOTH IN THE LOS ANGELES SUBURB of Tarzana, into one of the neighborhood's opulent gated communities, and find the large house on the left with the black Mercedes SLS AMG out front, its gull-wing doors raised in an ostentatious overhead greeting. Pause to admire the white Ferrari 458 Spider in front of it, which, like the SLS, is being washed and waxed on this blazing June day by a team of guys in matching gray polo shirts. Walk up the home's stone pathway, through the heavy wooden front doors, and try not to stumble over the luggage – Goyard, Vuitton, Givenchy – piled in the marble-floored foyer. Wave to the saleswoman from Cartier, who's made a house call with an array of Love Bracelets and other jewelry in tow. Pause to take in the cascading arrangement of fake flowers in the entryway, and let your gaze move upward

PHOTOGRAPH BY PEGGY SIROTA



along either of the two wrought-iron staircases to the second-floor landing, where an oil painting depicts a short man and a beautiful woman gazing down happily at the Vegas Strip. The short man is Kevin Hart, the hottest stand-up comic in America.

This is his home. Here comes Hart now, wearing furry slippers, distressed jean shorts and, around his neck, two likenesses of Jesus Christ pimpled with diamonds and swinging from gold chains. And here's the woman from the painting – Hart's fiancee, Eniko Parrish – wearing tiny blue sweatshorts and a tank top with Bob Marley's face across the front. She's riding a \$1,500 motorized plastic plank called a PhunkeeDuck across the dining-room floor. There are several large portraits of Hart's heroes on the walls: Eddie Murphy, Dave Chappelle, Jimi Hendrix. "We good, Giselle?" Hart calls over to the Cartier lady. "It'll be just a moment more – thank you," she replies, awaiting payment authorization. Hart, 36, and Parrish have a thing for Cartier's Love Bracelets, marketed as sharable between romantic partners, and Hart has bought enough of them – straightforward yellow-gold ones, which start at \$4,500 apiece; more elaborate ones with diamond settings, which start at \$40,000 – that Cartier gladly dispatches its employees directly to him. Today, Giselle also brought examples of another model, the Juste Un Clou, which resembles a long nail curved into a hoop. One, in diamond-studded white gold, catches Hart's eye: MSRP \$47,000. He adds it to the bill. "I'm still waiting for you to buy a watch from me one day!" Giselle tells Hart.

This is the life Kevin Hart long dreamed of. He dreamed about it when he was a kid growing up in Philadelphia – his sleeping quarters a bunk bed squeezed into the hallway of the one-bedroom apartment he shared with his single mom and older brother – and he dreamed about it when he was a fledgling road comic, putting thousands of miles on rental cars and his then-girlfriend's Grand Cherokee, zigzagging between crappy bookings. Hart has been a comedian since his late teens, but over the past several years he's drawn ever-larger crowds into ever-larger rooms – first theaters, then arenas, and at the end of August, an NFL stadium. His current tour, *What Now*, which cost him "something like 7, \$8 million" to produce, involves an enormous configuration of video screens, travels around on eight tractor-trailers and is on track to become the highest-grossing comedy tour of all time. When he passed through New York, in July, he played three nights at Madison Square Garden and another night at the Barclays Center – the kind of rooms, as his business partner Jeff

Contributing editor JONAH WEINER wrote about Arnold Schwarzenegger in May.

Clanagan puts it, "that Beyoncé and Jay Z play together, or Jay and Kanye – and he's playing them all by himself."

A virtuosic, hypercharged performer, Hart doesn't unfurl punchlines so much as long yarns about crazy relatives (in Hart's onstage depiction, his dad is a former drug addict with an arsenal of colorful catchphrases); about striving to overcome his own flaws (infidelity); and about one ludicrous indignity after the next. In one beloved bit, an ex-con dressed up as SpongeBob SquarePants terrorizes Hart at a children's birthday party. "Nobody told me that SpongeBob was fresh out!" Hart protests. "This nigga was fresh out of jail!" In another, he tries to hit on women while driving, only to realize that his kids' car seats are visible in the back seat, draining away his swagger. He's able to pivot smoothly from jokes that could fit into a family-friendly sitcom (the time he found himself stuck atop a runaway horse, his legs too short to reach the stirrups) to goofball surrealism (he insists a raccoon that lives near his house has repeatedly threatened to shoot him) to flashes of acid-tongued misanthropy (the bit where he tells an imposing fan at an airport, "Kill yourself – die").

Hart's most distinguishing trait as a stand-up, though, is how he combines all this with over-the-top spectacle, carrying on in the bombastic tradition of the Eddie Murphy he first saw in *Raw* – a vision of leather-clad black bravado that thrilled Hart in his youth. "He was my generation's, like, *'Holy shit, this guy is unbelievable'* – people fall at his feet, everything he says is golden." Hart takes stages via hidden elevators and catapults. He wears bespoke jackets, designer high-tops and tons of jewelry. His mic stand is gold. In 2013, Hart gave a theatrical release to his stand-up concert *Let Me Explain*, which featured enormous Metalllica-style columns of fire bursting from the stage – he sank \$2.5 million into the project, cut a deal with theater chains, then reaped \$32 million in box-office returns. Describing the upcoming *What Now* film, Hart says, "It's not a concert film – it's an action movie."

Meanwhile, he's parlayed his stage success into big TV hosting gigs (*Saturday Night Live*, MTV's *Video Music Awards*) and blockbuster comedies (*Ride Along*, *The Wedding Ringer*). He landed in L.A. at 7:30 this morning from Boston, where

he's shooting a new film with Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. He'll fly back to the set on a private jet tonight, after performing *What Now* for a sold-out crowd at the Staples Center. "You wouldn't believe how many people have hit me up for tickets today," he says. His ex-wife and the mother of his kids, Torrei Hart, is coming. Jeffrey Katzenberg will be backstage to say hello. Floyd Mayweather says he's coming too.

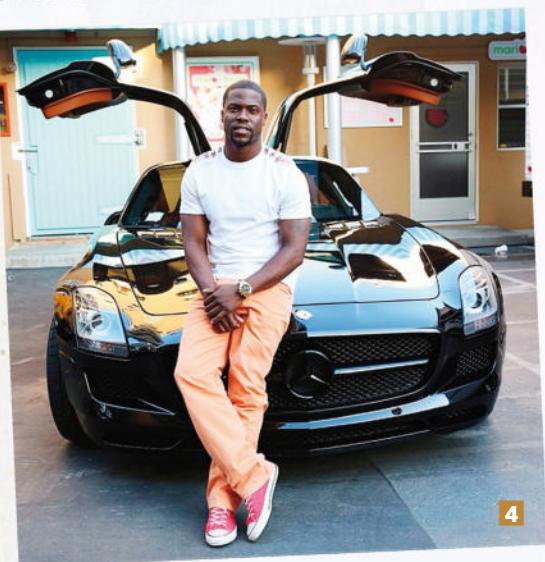
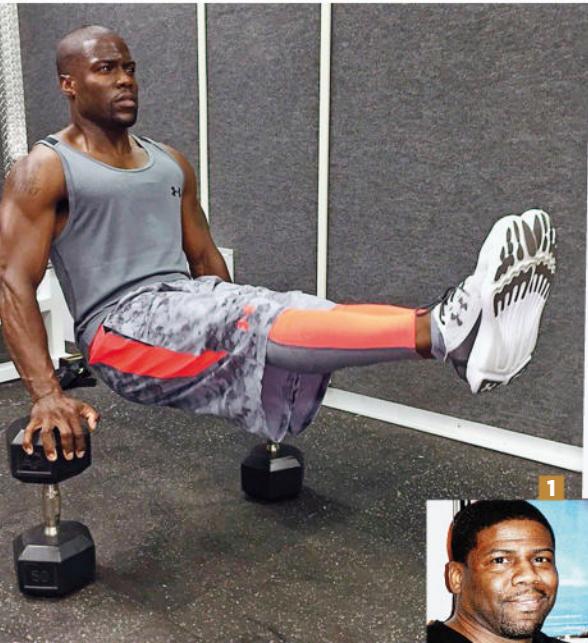
Hart works his phone, communicating with his team, with the guys washing his car, with Parrish in the other room. In the few hours he has in L.A., he's cramming in all sorts of housekeeping. "Multitasking!" he says. This morning, he met with contractors building him a new mansion up the 101, near his buddy Drake and some of the Kardashians. "We're gonna keep this house, maybe use it as a guest house for family," Hart says as he opens a door onto the in-home theater. He's a conscientious host: Last Christmas, Parrish bought him a massage chair from Brookstone, and he insists that I nestle into it, then kindly dials me up a 15-minute rub-down. "You like that?" He checks on his kids, of whom he shares custody: On a kitchen stool, his 10-year-old daughter,

Heaven, is getting her hair braided. His seven-year-old son, Hendrix, bounces around on a couch, wielding a plastic blunderbuss: "It's a fart gun," Hendrix says, aiming a blast my way. Hart scoops up Hendrix tenderly and, after dipping him upside down, plants him, shrieking with laughter, on his shoulders. When Heaven's hair is done, Hart pulls three hundred-dollar bills from his shorts and hands them to her to give to the hairdresser. "Tell her thank you and that your hair looks beautiful," he tells Heaven. "And say it nicely, please."

The subtext being that it's important, when whirlwinds of success threaten to sweep you away, to remain grounded. This is the message that Hart hammered home to me when I first met him, three years ago, at a Detroit casino. In town to play a *Let Me Explain* show for about half a million dollars, Hart blew \$10,000 in 45 minutes at a blackjack table, then retired to his penthouse suite to iron the custom-made leather T-shirt he'd wear onstage that night – if he delegated such chores to others, he explained, he risked losing touch.

It's one of several contradictions Hart juggles. He says success hasn't changed

I DON'T GIVE A SHIT ABOUT CRITICAL CONSENSUS! THEY POLL PEOPLE AFTER MY MOVIES, AND I GET A'S. WHEN I GET AN F, I'LL TAKE CRITICISM.



GOLDEN CHILD

(1) Hart posts snippets from his intense workouts on social media. (2) In Vegas with fiancee Eniko Parrish last year. (3) With brother Robert Hart and father Henry Witherspoon. (4) In 2013. He now calls himself a “comedic rock star.” (5) At his high school graduation with his late mother, Nancy.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: ARNOLD TURNER/INVISION/AP IMAGES; COURTESY OF KEVIN HART, 4

him, and yet he also styles himself a “comedic rock star.” He tries to keep his mostly autobiographical jokes true to his increasingly surreal life without alienating fans. “You don’t ever want to look down on your audience,” he says. Hart counts among his mentors superstars like Murphy and Chris Rock, and comics’ comics like Patrice O’Neal and Dave Attell, but ultimately he is comparable to no one in his field. To truly get his measure, you need to think about artist-businessmen like Jay Z or Tyler Perry. Hart has had a production company for five years; he leads a crew of comedians, nicknamed the Plastic Cup Boyz, who open for him at arenas and whose careers he hopes to launch to new heights. On the horizon, he is de-

veloping a video-sharing comedy site that he intends to rival Funny or Die, and has plans to penetrate the lucrative fitness sector. Kevin Hart, in other words, wants to become the world’s most hilarious mogul. “At this point,” he says, “I’m competing against Kevin Hart.”

HART CHANGES INTO HIS traveling clothes for the ride to the Staples Center: skinny jeans, tight denim shirt, Balmain sneakers. He stacks a Juste Un Clou and some Love Bracelets on his wrist. “You’re about to O.D.!” Parrish says, watching the babbles accumulate. Heaven and Hendrix wheel *Minions*-themed luggage to Hart’s

tricked-out chauffeured Mercedes Sprinter van, idling out front, because they’re flying with their dad to Massachusetts after the show. We roll off. Kevin Hart has his own logo – K ♥ – embroidered into the Sprinter’s carpeting. Hendrix plays games on his iPhone 6, but Heaven is feeling more talkative. “How can you breathe inside a car if there are no trees in a car?” she asks, having recently learned, it seems, that trees release oxygen into the atmosphere. Hart, typing tweets about tonight’s show, doesn’t answer, but he is an alert, doting dad. At one point, while I’m recounting one of his bits out loud, I use the word “fucking” – Heaven cries, “Dollar!” and Hart actually makes me put a buck in a swear jar.

Hart’s Sprinter merges onto the southbound 101. He’s accustomed at this point to sitting in traffic jams when driving to his shows: gridlock created by his own fans. “We get police escorts sometimes,” he says, but it’s early enough that the highway isn’t too clogged, and so we pull into a loading dock at the Staples Center with several hours to spare before showtime. In Hart’s dressing room, several guys from his entourage sit at a large table. One of them is Hart’s longtime co-writer Harry Ratchford, who explains that they’re playing Guts, “which is kind of like Poker, but the money piles up faster.” The biggest single hand they’ve ever played was “I think, \$32,000.” How’s Hart at it? “Like a lot of things with Kevin, he started horrible. He’d lose \$70,000 in a night. But he kept at it, kept getting better, and now you can’t beat him.”

A few feet away is a tall white guy with shaggy hair. This is Dave Becky, Hart’s manager. Becky’s client list includes numerous com-

edy greats – Amy Poehler, Louis C.K., Aziz Ansari – but he says Hart is unique in the way he combines the respect of his peers with his outsize tendencies. “On paper, if you told me there’s a guy selling crazy tickets with fire in his act, not knowing the comedian, I’d say that’s probably a guy who at his core is not great,” Becky says. “But Kevin sells out arenas, has this crazy production – and Chris Rock, who would usually absolutely hate that, calls him fucking amazing.”

Hart came up through Philadelphia clubs like the Laff House, eventually making a name for himself on the New York club circuit. At first he was far stronger as a performer than he was as a writer of jokes. He recalls being invited by a group

of more-established comics, like Bill Burr and O'Neal, who later befriended him, to a table at the Comedy Cellar, where they sat him down and trashed his hackier aspects. "I was doing a joke about a cross-eyed midget at the time," Hart says. "They were like, 'Really? Are you really teaching us something new about cross-eyed midgets?'" This was a rite of passage, he explains, in which they encouraged him to find laughs in harder-to-reach places: "They were telling me, 'You're good enough for us to shit all over you.'"

Stand-up is Hart's first love, and he says he'll never stop telling jokes onstage, no matter how many movies he does. But he also wants to be sure that, in writing about him, I capture his business ambitions and acumen. For instance, Hart's social-media presence has grown so enormous – he has more than 56 million followers across the major platforms – that his company Hartbeat Digital charges studios extra for his tweets or Instagrams about movies he's in. It was for this reason that a Sony executive, discussing Hart in e-mails exposed during that company's infamous hack, called him "a whore." Hart responded with an impassioned Instagram post about knowing, and protecting, his self-worth, and he said later that he harbored no ill will toward the exec. Talking about it now, Hart says, "Studios will do ad buys to promote films – with my numbers on social media, why wouldn't they pay me, too?"

After grabbing a quick bite from the steam trays in his dressing room, Hart walks to a small office across the hall, where he's arranged a meeting with two marketing reps from a major athletics-apparel company. Hart's devotees have come to know him as a fitness freak: He routinely posts images online of his workouts and uses hashtags like #HealthIsWealth and #FitFamily. He invited the reps here in hopes of obtaining an endorsement deal – he wants to partner with them at co-branded fitness events and appear in their ads. He tells them it would be counterintuitively genius for the company to give him, a nonathlete, the sort of deal usually reserved for pros like LeBron James and David Beckham. (Hart pauses to note that he will be appearing alongside Beckham in an H&M ad campaign.) In two cities so far during the What Now tour, he goes on, he's arranged spontaneous 5K runs – inviting his fan base out for early-morning jogs.

He's going to keep doing these 5Ks, with a blowout installment planned for his upcoming stop in Philadelphia, where he's playing the 69,000-seat Lincoln Financial Field: "I'm gonna run up the *Rocky* steps for the finish." So far, he says, "People think these runs are just for fun." But Hart has a secret plan. "My number-one priority is: People are dying. They need to get off the couch. Fitness is real. Aunt A and Uncle C are dying. We gotta get people to understand that." Number two? "Kevin Hart is a walking marketing tool," he says. "Say you guys have a new product coming, say it wicks the moisture, whatever, I don't know what the fuck it does – whatever the product is, I can wear it and market it at the runs in a way that looks authentic. It won't look like a commercial. Because I'm actually your consumer, the non-athlete who works out hard, and I have a direct connection to my fan base." There's a charity angle to boot: "I'm donating money from my Philly show to renovate parks in the inner city, put them in my mother's name, out of my pocket. I'm doing playgrounds because I want something visual that I can be associated with." The reps nod slowly, absorbing all this. Before they can respond, Hart hits them with the kicker: "With or without a brand, I'm doing it." He lets it slip that talks with other companies are imminent. "It's gonna happen. But how much stronger would it be with your brand?"

And with that, the reps ask me to leave so they can talk more freely. Later, avoiding specifics, Hart says, "I crushed it – they were speechless."

MANY COMEDIANS aren't overly interested in being funny when they're not performing, but Hart takes it to another level. In business meetings and interviews, he's unselfconsciously earnest when he's talking about himself – a sharp difference between his sly, self-deprecating onstage persona. In one raucous moment during What Now, Hart describes experimenting with sex toys meant to simulate different orifices, after Parrish gives him a "pocket pussy" to encourage his fidelity when they're apart. It's a wonderfully filthy bit about a once-philandering man reckoning, messily, with new love and monogamy. Ask Hart in person

about the themes he's exploring, however, and he'll say something bland about "how I've grown as a man." In such moments, he seems less like a comedian and more like an athlete offering post-game bromides. Maybe in part it's because, as a kid, he was both class clown and jock. During high school, Hart competed on the swim team and played basketball. A small-built kid, he also learned to rely on his wits, making himself popular by cracking up classmates.

Hart's father, Henry Witherspoon, separated from Kevin's mother when he was around four. Hart says that when he was about 12, he was out with his dad when Witherspoon pointed out a young man nearby and told Hart, "That's your brother Omar." Kevin, who'd grown up with his older brother Robert, was confused. It turned out that Witherspoon had fathered a boy with another woman, and this was the way Kevin found out.

In Hart's act, he tends to describe his father as a more or less lovable cartoonish character, referring only obliquely to darker moments, like the family gathering where Witherspoon tried to steal a \$20 bill given to Kevin by a relative, or those times, Hart says, when Witherspoon has alluded to "sucking dick" for money during the depths of his addiction. I ask Hart how his father, who remains in his life, responds to such bits. "He laughs!" Hart says, adding, "He can't say shit, because I take care of him." Hart's got his own hedonistic streak that he's learned to keep in check the hard way: In 2013, he pleaded no contest to one count of DUI and received a sentence of three years of probation and three months of alcohol-education classes. But overall he seems to wear the burdens of his childhood lightly. Robert Hart, who is eight years older than Kevin, and with whom he remains close, says this is because he was insulated from Witherspoon's worst behavior: "My dad was crazy. Kevin was too young to know that the shit was as dysfunctional as it was." In Witherspoon's absence, Robert – a former barbershop owner who is now a professional pool player – says he became something of a father figure to Kevin. "If he had a bad report card or cussed, he had to worry about me," Robert says. He adds, laughingly, that Kevin was always an extrovert, "but he's my younger brother, so he wasn't funny to me, he was stupid! He was being an asshole! It was, 'Act like you got some damn sense!'"

Hart wasn't a great student, and after high school, "I went to community college for, like, a week and a half, but then I fell in love with the whole comedy thing, and I told my mom, 'This is what I'm going to do, I really have a passion for this,'" he recalls. He got interested in stand-up after a co-worker at a Philadelphia sneaker store encouraged him to drop in on an open-mic night. Hart's mother, Nancy, a com-

"I'VE PERFORMED AT ATLANTIC CITY STRIP CLUBS, FAMILY DINNERS, FUNCTIONS – ALL THE SHOTS TO MY PRIDE HAVE BEEN TAKEN."

puter analyst at the University of Pennsylvania, agreed to pay his \$550 monthly rent as he chased the dream: "She said, 'I'll help you out for a year.'" This support came with only one string attached: "She was putting the rent checks in my Bible, and there was a point where I was back on my rent for, like, two months and I was like, 'Mom, I need the checks.' And she was like, 'Have you been reading your Bible?' I would just keep lying: 'Yes, Mom, it's not about that right now.' She said, 'When you read your Bible, I'll know.'

Hart's talents impressed established comedians like Keith Robinson and Attell, who gave Hart crucial early support, and for a moment it seemed he might become a star almost overnight – in relatively short order, he got a series picked up at ABC and landed a starring role in *Soul Plane*. "He was what I call Hollywood Hot," says Becky. But the ABC series was quickly canceled, and *Soul Plane* was a flop. In 2001, Hart auditioned for *Saturday Night Live*, but he was rejected. Becky recalls, "We were sure he was gonna get it, but it came down to Kevin and Dean Edwards" – a comedian who left *SNL* two years later – "and the other guy got it. The first thing Kevin did was to call him and say congratulations. He's had ups and downs, but he's never complained – he's just kept working."

"I've been to some of the damnedest places for comedy," Hart says. "I performed in a place in Atlantic City called Sweet Cheeks. It was a male strip night, and some nights a female strip night, and in the middle they would stop the stripper show and have intermission, where as comedians it was our job to go up and make the people laugh. I performed at family dinners, family functions, like where you get there and you're the entertainment for a household. You name it: All shots to my pride have been taken."

With Hollywood glory forestalled, Hart redoubled his focus on stand-up. Between a barrage of small roles in projects from *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* to *Scary Movie 4*, he added another element to his act, offsetting his flights of silliness and inspired physical comedy with an autobiographical strain. By 2011's 90-city Laugh at My Pain tour, he'd found ways to eke out laughs from his father's troubles, from his crumbling marriage with Torrei, and, perhaps darkest of all, from his mother's death, in 2007, from ovarian cancer. The subject of her illness, which she kept secret from him for a while, for fear of distracting him from his career, is one that can reliably choke him up. "She was a strong woman, dude," he says. "Didn't take no shit."

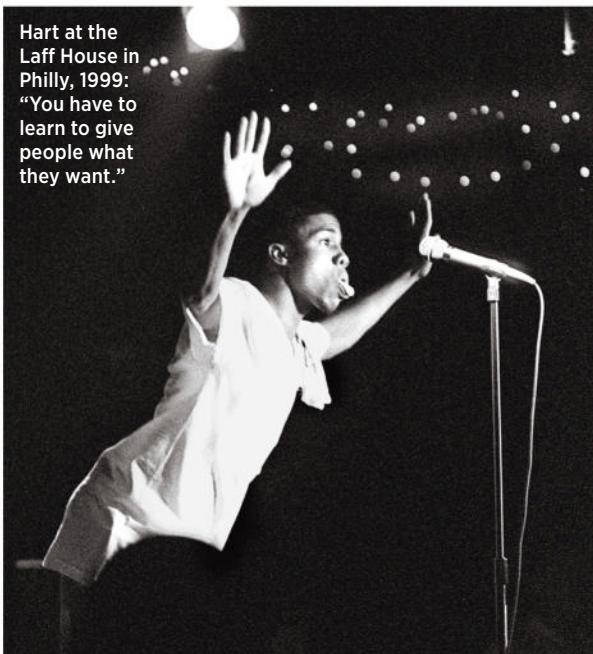
The success of Laugh at My Pain got Hollywood's attention. After the romantic comedy *Think Like a Man*, anchored by Hart, enjoyed a \$33 million opening weekend, Becky says, "The offers started pouring in." Hart is routinely the best thing about the movies he's in, but he says he isn't bothered that he has yet to star in a particularly well-reviewed film. "I don't

care between bringing a joke across that's well thought-out and saying something just to ruffle feathers." Even so, he adds, "I wouldn't tell that joke today, because when I said it, the times weren't as sensitive as they are now. I think we love to make big deals out of things that aren't necessarily big deals, because we can. These things become public spectacles. So why set yourself up for failure?"

Race as an overt topic figures very little into Hart's comedy. His core audience is black, but "I approach it on a universal level," he says, and the proof of his success on this score is the racially diverse crowd that now comes out to see him. "If you associate yourself with one group of people, you alienate another 12, you know? So the thing for me is, how can I make everybody laugh at this one thought? The thought may be provoked by something that happened on the stoop or at the barbershop, but now how do I make it broad enough for everyone to understand it and see it?" I ask if he has ever felt compelled to address race more pointedly in his act, particularly in the past year, when racism, and racist violence, have dominated the national conversation. He says that, offstage, these issues infuriate him: "A guy in the hood with two

nickel bags of weed gets five years in jail, because they say they want to make an example of him, but I haven't seen one judge make an example out of one of these police officers that killed one of these young black men." But he keeps it offstage: "When I see videos of children being shot dead by police, I don't talk about it because it's something that scares me. Because I have kids. At that point, it's not a joking matter. There is no joking there. I would not touch it."

Part of the reason is that Hart wants to be seen as "a motivational figure. I won't acknowledge what I won't let beat me. Have I experienced racism? Of course. But will I make you feel superior by saying I've felt trumped at times? No. I'll beat you by succeeding. I want to show my generation that a man of color, despite the roadblocks, can still make it. There's moments when I took to social media and said things, but it's always been on the positive side. I gave a message to Baltimore: At the end of the day, we're only hurting ourselves by destroying what we have. We have to go back and live there. We're torching, firebombing, looting our stuff. We need that CVS! Be smarter than this!" Hart doesn't see a time coming when he explores racism in his act, like his idols Rock and Chappelle do. Hart characterizes his appeal differently. "It's not my style of comedy," he says. "It angers me, but not onstage. Onstage, my job [Cont. on 66]



Hart at the Laff House in Philly, 1999:
"You have to learn to give people what they want."

A journey into one of the most remote
and dangerous countries in the world

YEMEN'S HIDDEN WAR

BY MATTHIEU AIKINS

Photographs by Sebastiano Tomada

DAWN IS JUST BREAKING ON JUNE 5TH AT DJIBOUTI'S INTERNATIONAL airport, but it's already boiling hot on the tarmac. Mohammed Issa, a rotund and mustachioed border-police officer, gestures to a massive U.S. Air Force transport jet – a gray C-17 Globemaster – sitting a short distance away. "Since the start of the war in Yemen, it's been crazy here," he says. "Military flights, humanitarian aid – sometimes there's no space to park on the tarmac." ¶ Djibouti is a tiny state of citrus-colored shacks and goat-lined boulevards tucked into a barren, volcanic stretch of the Horn of Africa. It sits astride the narrow straits that lead to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, and is home to the U.S.'s only permanent military base in Africa, Camp Lemonnier, linchpin of one of the Obama administration's most secretive and controversial programs: the drone-based campaign of surveillance and assassination against Al Qaeda and its allies in Somalia and Yemen. ¶ Yemen, an impoverished, restive nation of





The old city of
Sana'a after a
Saudi airstrike
destroyed
several homes

27 million on the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula has, in particular, been the focus of extensive counterterrorism efforts since the deadly attack on the *USS Cole* in 2000. Its branch of Al Qaeda has hatched some of the most dangerous plots against the United States, including the so-called Underwear Bomber, who tried to take down a commercial jet over Detroit with explosives in his boxer shorts. The Obama administration assassinated its first U.S. citizen, the fiery propagandist Anwar al-Awlaki, in Yemen's arid badlands. American special-operations forces have spent years training Yemeni counterterrorism units. In his speech unveiling his plan to combat ISIS last September, Obama held up Yemen as an example of where the U.S. had "successfully pursued" his counterterrorism strategy.

That strategy has now completely unraveled, as Yemen has become the latest country in the Middle East to descend into a full-fledged civil war. In March, after Houthi rebels seized control of the government, a coalition of Arab states led by Saudi Arabia, which accuses the Houthis of being supported by its archrival Iran, launched a U.S.-supported campaign of airstrikes and imposed a land, air and sea blockade of the country – which it says is necessary to keep out Iranian weapons.

Four months of bitter fighting later, the Houthis control even more territory. And the conflict has pushed this already impoverished country to the brink of a massive humanitarian catastrophe, with the aid community warning of an impending famine if the blockade is not lifted. More than 3,700 Yemenis have died, nearly half of them civilians, and more than 1.25 million have been displaced from their homes.

Meanwhile, Al Qaeda has taken advantage of the chaos to seize wide swaths of eastern Yemen, including the port city of Mukalla, and has called for new attacks against the U.S. ISIS has gained a foothold and launched car-bomb attacks in the capital. Forced to evacuate its embassy and 125 special-operations advisers, the U.S. found its counterterrorism strategy in shambles, with many of the weapons and equipment it supplied to Yemen reported to be in the hands of militias.

MATTHIEU AIKINS is the Schell Fellow at the Nation Institute. He wrote about ISIS and Iraq's civil war in March.

"The coalition campaign in Yemen has devastating consequences for the U.S. counterterrorism strategy," says April Longley Alley, an analyst with the International Crisis Group. "They can continue to whack-a-mole with drone strikes, but the threat has become much deeper and more complicated over the long term."

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE war, Saudi Arabia has been preventing journalists from boarding the few humanitarian flights and ships it allows into Yemen, which

DEADLY PASSAGE

The crew that helped the author and the photographer sneak past Saudi patrols



IF I WANTED TO GET INTO YEMEN BY SEA, I WOULD HAVE TO FIND A SMUGGLER WILLING TO RUN THE NAVAL BLOCKADE.

is otherwise cut off from the world by the coalition blockade. I arrive in Djibouti in the hopes of finding a refugee or cargo boat that could take me there, but the news is bad. The Djiboutian government, I'm told, at the behest of the Saudi coalition, has recently started vetting even small commercial vessels. If my photographer and I want to get in by sea, we will have to find a smuggler willing to run the naval blockade in a speedboat.

The boat we find is 23 feet long and made of fiberglass, with a low, dagger-shaped hull, and looks a little flimsy for a 130-mile crossing of the Bab al Mandab strait. As we leave the port, an American military speedboat loops by to take a look at us, and my photographer and I slouch below the low gunwales. Once we are out to sea, our captain, whom I'll call Yousuf, relaxes. Like many of the fishermen who plied the coastal waters of the Horn of Africa, he is used to taking unusual cargo. In past years, he has taken Ethiopian mi-

grants, crammed in 30 or more at a time, on this route and deposited them clandestinely on the Yemeni shore, to continue their harrowing journey in search of work in the wealthy petro-monarchies of the Persian Gulf. "They don't know enough to be afraid," he says.

Over the horizon to our starboard is the port of Aden, which had once been the capital of an independent South Yemen, before the nation was reunited in 1990 under Ali Abdullah Saleh. Saleh had been a key U.S. ally and had supported the drone program in return for aid, but he was toppled

in 2011 by protests during the Arab Spring, by demonstrators who demanded the same things as those in Cairo and Damascus: an end to economic stagnation and corruption, and the unaccountable, repressive institutions that sustained the region's strongmen.

For a moment, Yemen seemed like an Arab Spring success story. Saleh's relatively peaceful departure was brokered by the U.N., Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council. In the aftermath of the agreement, Saleh's vice president, Abdu Rabbo Mansur Hadi, ran unopposed for president and won. But the hopes of 2011 gradually faded as the country's political elites dallied and squabbled in the capital, Sana'a. Under Hadi's ineffectual reign, corruption and the economy worsened.

Meanwhile, the Houthis, a band of militia fighters based in the northern province of Saada, grew more and more powerful. Over the past few years, as Yemen's political order collapsed from infighting, the Houthis expanded their territory through a combination of political bargains and military victories, entering Sana'a last September and finally putting Hadi under house arrest in January. The next month, he escaped to Aden, where, backed by Saudi funding and weapons, he declared a new temporary capital. The Houthis marched into the south, Hadi fled to Riyadh, and the Saudi-led bombing campaign and blockade began.

As night falls, the boat's passage kicks up a glowing trail of phosphorescent algae in the dark and muggy sea. Yousuf can still navigate using the lights of the shoreline, but it doesn't seem wise to try to enter the rebel-held port at night in the middle of a civil war. We decide to anchor in the lee of a small island, and we bob gently for a few hours, watching a distant procession of tankers and contain-

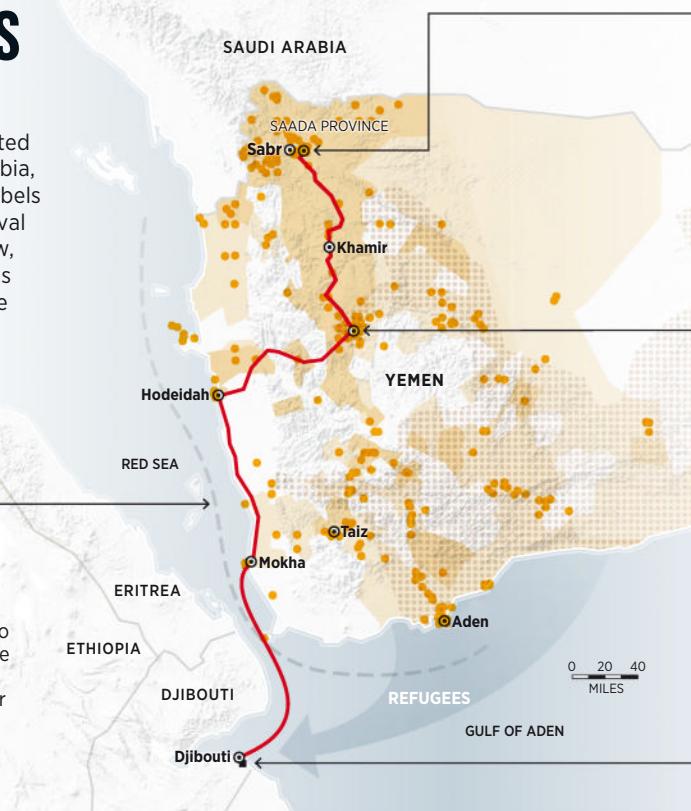
THE CRISIS IN YEMEN

When civil war erupted in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, fearing the rise of rebels sympathetic to its rival Iran, intervened; now, the conflict threatens to further destabilize the war-torn region.

- Author's Route
- Houthi control or influence
- Houthi's operate
- Al Qaeda operates
- Saudi airstrikes

SAUDI NAVAL BLOCKADE

To prevent Iranian aid from reaching Houthi rebels, Saudi Arabia has imposed a de-facto blockade of the remote country. Now, four months later, with over a million displaced, a full-on humanitarian disaster is underway.



SAADA CITY

A Houthi stronghold on the front line of the conflict; the Saudis have declared it a "military target," and scores of civilians have been killed.

SANA'A

The capital, regularly bombed by the Saudis, who target homes, killing civilians and massively damaging the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

U.S. CAMP LEMONNIER

Djibouti is home to the lone permanent U.S. military base in Africa, and a linchpin in the campaign against Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.



er ships steaming through the channel toward the Suez Canal.

Near dawn, we weigh anchor and set off again through choppy seas. The rising sun is obscured by a scrim of haze hanging over the highlands to the east as we approach the small port city of Mokha. The driver of a passing skiff smuggling gasoline has warned us there were airstrikes the night before, but we find a scene of calm activity at the pier. Teenage-looking Houthi fighters with battered Kalashnikovs take us to a weary but friendly civil servant; with assent, he stamps our passports and welcomes us to Yemen.

Our fixer has come down from Sana'a to pick us up, and we begin the long journey north to the capital in the mountains. There is a fuel shortage because of the blockade, and the highways are empty of traffic. In the port of Hodeidah, the breakdown in public services is apparent as we drive through puddles of raw sewage and around mounds of trash piled high in the roundabouts. There has been little or no electricity for months, and in the sweltering June nights, people have taken to sleeping in the streets, where they risk catching dengue fever from the mosquitoes – a major outbreak of the virus has hit coastal Yemen, with more than 8,000 cases reported in Aden alone.

It is night by the time we reach Sana'a. The capital lies in a bowl of mountains at more than 7,000 feet, and is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on Earth. In the age of camel caravans, it was a trad-

ing entrepôt between West and East, and was famous for the rich incenses and perfumes coveted in the temples of ancient Rome. Yemen's diaspora of merchants has spread around Africa and Asia, including the construction magnate Mohammed bin Laden, whose son Osama would be raised in his adopted homeland of Saudi Arabia.

In happier times, Yemen's warm, traditional society has been a magnet for adventure-minded tourists, and its fanciful old cities, whose multistory mud houses have been dubbed the "world's first skyscrapers," are UNESCO-listed World Heritage Sites. Now, however, blockaded and bombarded, the capital was in utter darkness, broken only by our headlights and the lamps wielded by Houthi fighters at checkpoints.

"This war overall has less to do with Yemen and more to do with Saudi Arabia's obsession with Iran's rise in the region," says Farea al-Muslimi, a Yemeni political analyst and a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Middle East Center. "It has to do with a regional message, especially from the Saudis to the U.S.: We don't need you, we can take the lead in our own war."

On March 25th, the Saudis launched Operation Decisive Storm. Its name wasn't the only thing that seemed torn from a Bush-era playbook. They had assembled a coalition of the willing, which included the wealthy Gulf states of the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrain – who, like the Saudis, were flush with U.S. and Western military equipment – as well as Egypt and unlikelier add-ons like Sudan and Morocco. The coalition contributed a handful of aircraft, but the majority was from the Saudi air force.

The Saudis' goal had been to force the Houthis to withdraw from Sana'a and return Hadi to power, but it was unclear how air power alone would achieve that, as the rebels continued their advance across the country, pushing into oil-rich Marib Province and capturing Al Anad air base, where U.S. special forces had been stationed. On April 21st, the Saudi military declared that Decisive Storm's mission had been accomplished, claiming that the threat from ballistic missiles and heavy weapons captured by the Houthis had been neutralized. (On June 6th, the Houthis fired their first Scud missile at Saudi Arabia.) Next, the Sau-

SAUDI ARABIA AND YEMEN might be likened to the U.S. and Mexico. Deep economic and cultural ties between the two countries have been strained by smuggling and illegal immigration, even as Saudi Arabia is home to a substantial population of Yemeni workers. And like the U.S. in Latin America, Saudi Arabia has always envisioned a right to intervene in the internal affairs of its poorer southern neighbor, based on its own national security. Though there is little evidence of direct Iranian military support for the Houthis, Saudi Arabia's Sunni monarchy has been increasingly concerned with a perceived Shiite threat from Iran, especially in the wake of its successful nuclear negotiations with the U.S.

dis launched Operation Renewal of Hope, whose objectives included "protecting civilians."

Meanwhile, the bombing and fighting across Yemen escalated. On an almost daily basis, the rumble of jets filled the air above Sana'a. Houthi anti-aircraft gunners would start firing – the jets flew so high that it was unclear what they were hoping to accomplish, and their shells would often land and cause casualties in the city – followed by the heavy explosions of airstrikes. The bombing did succeed in destroying much of Yemen's military and government infrastructure that the Houthis had captured. The Yemeni air force was wiped out, and the results of the U.S.'s train-and-equip program – worth \$500 million since 2007 – vanished as security forces abandoned their posts or joined warring militias. On May 27th, the Saudis flattened the Special Security Force base in Sana'a, which had been home to the U.S.-funded and -trained Counterterrorism Unit.

By the time we arrive, however, the Saudis have been targeting individual houses in and around the densely packed capital, which, no matter how exact American precision-guided technology might be, leads inevitably to civilian death. In one early-morning strike against the house of one of President Saleh's relatives

that I visited on June 13th, five members of a single family were killed when one of the bombs overshot its target by 20 feet and landed in front of their home.

As a result of the conflict, Yemen was splitting into north and south. Even as the Houthis consolidated their grip on Sana'a, by mid-July Saudi-backed Yemeni militiamen and armored vehicles from the Emirates had helped pro-Hadi forces establish a foothold in Aden. On July 16th, a delegation of exiled ministers flew back to the shattered southern city to prepare to establish a rival capital.

Meanwhile, as civilian casualties mount and Al Qaeda thrives on the chaos, the Obama administration is facing a dilemma of its own. American officials have warned that the U.S. counterterrorism strategy has suffered a setback in Yemen. "Al Qaeda is controlling an important port city, and their safe haven is unmolested by coalition airstrikes," says Alley of the Crisis Group. "It's quite clear that in many Western governments, there's a growing discomfort with the war."

For now, the American government continues to support the campaign by providing aerial refueling, intelligence support and targeting assistance. Four of the wealthy Gulf states involved – Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and the UAE – are

home to key U.S. military bases and are participating in the campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. "For the U.S., Yemen is just not that important, especially when you have bigger issues like wrapping up the Iranian nuclear negotiations," says Alley. "The Saudis have brought significant weight to bear on pressuring their allies to support them. Why cross them and create tension?"

SINCE THE HOUTHS TOOK OVER Sana'a, their five-line slogan has become ubiquitous, affixed at checkpoints and chanted at noisy political rallies:

*God is great
Death to America
Death to Israel
A curse upon the Jews
Victory to Islam*

"WHEREVER THERE IS UNITED STATES INTERFERENCE, THERE IS AL QAEDA," SAYS ONE REBEL. "IT'S TO THEIR ADVANTAGE."

With their echo of the Iranian revolutionaries' infamous battle cry, the Houthis – who call themselves Ansar Allah, or Partisans of God – have presented an increasingly vexing enigma to the United States. They are often portrayed as a sectarian Shiite militia and combatants in a larger proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia that's taking place in Iraq and Syria. In an op-ed in *The New York Times* in April, Hadi, the exiled Saudi-backed president, warned that the Houthis were "puppets of the Iranian government," a threat to the region's shipping lanes and "destined to become the next Hezbollah."

In Western media, the conflict has been cast in sectarian tones, with the shorthand reference, as the same newspaper's editorial board put it in early July, to "an indigenous Shiite group allied with Iran." The truth is far more complex and grounded in Yemen's highly diverse society and tangled politics. For example, the Houthis are actually Zaydi Shiites, which is a different sect from Iranian Twelver Shiism, and closer in doctrine and tradition to Yemen's Sunni majority.

At a hotel in downtown Sana'a, I meet with Mohammed al-Bukhaiti, a senior Houthi official and member of Ansar Allah's political committee. A short, broad-shouldered man with close-cropped stub-

ble, Bukhaiti moves around the capital with a Kalashnikov and two bodyguards. A longtime political activist against Saleh's regime, he had spent years in exile in Canada and is quick to reminisce about its fast-food chains and friendly people. He is unapologetic, though, about Ansar Allah's anti-American ideology, which holds U.S. imperialism responsible for much of the Middle East's troubles. "Look what happened in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and now Yemen," he says. "Wherever there is U.S. interference, there is Al Qaeda and ISIS. It's to their advantage."

The Houthis' philosophy both looks back to Islam's original Sunni-Shia schism in the seventh century A.D. and forward to a contemporary global opposition to U.S. dominance that includes an admiration for Latin American leftism. "We should repeat the experience of the people of South America," he says. "They enlightened themselves about the danger of American policy."

When I point out that Ansar Allah's slogan is anti-Semitic, Bukhaiti insists that they are not against Jews as a people, but Israel's treatment of Palestinians. "If we were around during the time of the Nazis, we would support the Jews," he says.

The mixture of Islamism and Che Guevara is clearly influenced by the radical ideology of the Iranian Revolution, and Ansar Allah has warm relations with Iran and the other militant groups it supports, as Bukhaiti openly acknowledges. "Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah – what unites us is that we are against American imperialism. It's not something that we hide. We're proud of it." But he denies that they receive material support from Iran, or are in any way indebted to them: "We will never allow Iran to come here and use Yemen against any other country."

The Houthis are not a monolithic group, and during the National Dialogue Conference in 2013, which was supposed to determine Yemen's new political order, they advanced a surprisingly liberal agenda, one that supported limited women's rights and placed Islamic law as only one of the sources for legislation. But their critics see them returning to their core identity as a militia in response to the pressures of war, especially in the wake the assassinations of Houthi intellectuals like Ahmad Sharafeddin, killed on his way to the National Dialogue's final plenary session. "The problem is not that [the Houthi delegates] weren't genuine but that they were powerless," says the Carnegie Center's Muslimi.

The Houthis see themselves as the only party in Yemen that has been truly committed to and effective in battling Al



THE MAIN REASON WHY Saudi Arabia views Yemen as such a vital strategic interest – and its Achilles’ heel – is the 1,100-mile border between the two countries, which stretches over remote and mountainous terrain. Saada Province, on the Yemeni side, is the Houthis’ traditional stronghold, and since the start of the war, fighting between Ansar Allah and the Saudi army has escalated. “They’re a big challenge to the Saudis militarily,” says Muslimi. “The Houthis have nothing to lose. They can send thousands of people to the borders to die.”

The Saudis have responded by intensively bombing and shelling northern Yemen. On May 8th, in a move reminiscent of the U.S.’s “free-fire zones” in Vietnam, Saudi Arabia declared the cities of Sadaa and Marran to be “military targets” and reportedly dropped leaflets warning the entire civilian population to leave by 7 p.m. that evening.

Both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have accused Saudi Arabia of violating international humanitarian law. “The strikes killing civilians, in which there was no apparent military target, show at least a cruel indifference,” says Belkis Wille of Human Rights Watch. “Bomb attacks that deliberately or recklessly targeted civilians would amount to war crimes.” (A representative at the Saudi embassy in Washington, D.C., did not respond to a request for comment.)

Yet there was little news from Saada; no

Western journalists had visited since the start of the war. Even the Red Cross had to temporarily abandon its office there. The only foreigners left were a medical team from Doctors Without Borders (also known by its French initials as MSF) that was holed up in a hospital in Saada City.

Getting there meant driving the highway 115 miles north from the capital, through arid mountains with bright-green irrigated valleys slashed through them. Saada has long been one of the most traditional parts of Yemen, and the villages here are built like fortresses from the mud they sit on, with three-story crenelated towers and slotted turrets that stand watch over verdant fields of khat, the popular local stimulant.

Once we reach the border of Saada Province, every few miles we encounter

NO END IN SIGHT

(1) Saudi-led airstrikes have led to mass destruction. (2) Bukhaiti, a rebel leader, with his bodyguards: “What unites us is that we are against American imperialism.” When Saleh (3) was replaced by Hadi (4) as president, there was hope for reform, but the country descended into chaos.



4



3



2

Qaeda. Bukhaiti points out that both the former Saleh regime and the Saudis have had ambiguous relationships with Sunni jihadists, seeking to use them for their own ends. He tries to portray Ansar Allah’s takeover as defensive in nature: “If we withdraw from the South now, Al Qaeda will fill the vacuum.”

At their office in Sana'a, I visit Radyha al-Mutawakel and Abdulrasheed al-Faqih, a married couple who run Mwatana, one of the few independent and active human rights nongovernmental organizations in Yemen. They are both diminutive and gentle-mannered, and finish each other’s sentences in their soft voices; they expect any day that Ansar Allah might arrest them or shut them down. Mwatana had documented the abuses that the Houthis had suffered under Saleh’s counterinsurgency

war; now, the tables are turned, with Amnesty International accusing the militia of torturing protesters in an attempt to suppress any opposition. “Once the Houthis took power, they became the main source of violations,” says Mutawakel. “They are doing extrajudicial detentions and attacking media and civil society.”

Since the start of the war, Ansar Allah has raided a number of media outlets and NGOs, particularly ones connected to its principal rival, the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Opposing politicians have also been arrested and held without charge. Yemen’s judicial system has largely broken down, and those detained by the Houthis lack any access to due process. “Anyone who speaks out against the Houthis, they take him,” says Faqih. “The worst might be yet to come.”

a charred hulk by the side of the road, or a massive crater that forces us to divert into the fields around it. Saudi jets have been targeting vehicles traveling the highway. Most of the recognizable wrecks are oil tankers or heavy trucks, but others are clearly ordinary vehicles – we pass a blasted flatbed with dozens of little dead goats scattered around it, and another damaged, abandoned pickup that is loaded with sacks of onions. The checkpoints here are mostly deserted – many bear damage from airstrikes – and the few vehicles we cross on the road are driving as fast as they can. From time to time, we can hear the rumble of a jet somewhere high above us.

When we arrive in Saada City, the devastation becomes apparent. On the deserted main road, two thin lanes have been cleared in the rubble and dust. On each side is a long stretch of shattered apartments and shops, their metal shutters crumpled like discarded tissue paper. Other buildings have been flattened by bomb strikes, their concrete floors pancaking down. We turn a corner and head into the old section of the city, where elaborate mud houses have been pulverized. Skirting a massive crater in front of the 1,200-year-old Imam al-Hadi mosque – it is deep enough to swallow a city bus – we pull into al-Jumhouri Hospital.

The hospital is a relative safe haven in Saada due to the presence of the MSF team, who had arrived in May. “They won’t target us because of the foreigners,” says Mohammad Hajjar, the hospital’s director, a tall man with a permanently creased brow. When the bombing started, much of the hospital’s staff fled, but Hajjar had remained behind with a small crew, bolstered by volunteers. Outside of the city, the public-health system in Saada has largely collapsed, with the U.N. rating Saada as the only province in Yemen that was “impossible or nearly impossible” to access.

The MSF team has set up two big overflow tents in the courtyard outside the ER; the week before we arrived, they had treated around 200 patients. “I’ve never seen what I’ve seen here,” says Maria Green, an Argentine nurse who was the medical team’s leader. She and her colleagues have been working nonstop since arriving and have barely slept from the constant airstrikes at night, some of them in close proximity to the compound. She has treated victims from the wars in Syria and the Central African Republic, but has found the results of modern air power shocking.



1



2

“The kind of trauma you get from explosions – patients are coming in destroyed,” she says, “and they all come at once.”

The hospital is short on nearly everything, especially anesthetic. Even if they can get to Sana'a, medical supplies are drying up as the blockade wears on. For example, Hajjar tells me they have been surprised by a surge in snakebite victims; the bombings are so fierce that serpents swarm out of the ground, or else people encounter them when they flee their homes for the forest and caves. Hospital staff searched for antivenom in Sana'a but were able to find only five vials. “We are in a terrible situation,” Hajjar says. “If the Saudis could blockade the air we breathe, they would.” He says the hospital only has about 10 days of fuel left, and without it, its generators and intensive-care machines will stop. “We’ve had three fuel tankers try to deliver, and they’ve all been attacked on the road and destroyed,” he says.

CASUALTIES OF WAR

(1) MSF doctors treating a civilian in Sadaa. Humanitarian groups have suggested the Saudis may be guilty of war crimes. (2) Houthi fighters on patrol. (3) More than a million civilians have fled their homes; IDP camps have sprung up, but disease and hunger plague the refugees.



3

At the hospital, I meet Fatehi Betal, who is part of a local Houthi-affiliated civil council that is documenting the airstrikes. His family fled when the bombing started and their home had been reduced to rubble. A 24-year-old with rimless glasses and a tense expression that occasionally breaks into a youthful smile, Betal shows me the notes and photos that he has accumulated. According to his count, 341 civilians have been killed in the province since the start of the war. “Saada is different from other cities in Yemen,” he says.

"They target any gathering. We can't even pray in the mosque."

Leaving the safe confines of the hospital, Betal takes me on a macabre tour of the city's destruction. Saada's old souk, once packed with spice and textile sellers, is half-destroyed and empty except for stray dogs lying forlornly where the butcher shops had once been. We visit a car sales lot filled with charred wrecks, a blasted water bottling factory, and cratered restaurants and shopping plazas. Betal shows us the casing of a cluster bomb, and a half-exploded 1,000-pound bomb, both made in the U.S. The post office, central bank and cell-phone network have been wiped out. Almost all the gas stations in Saada have been hit; at the Jarman station, there is a long line of incinerated vehicles. An air-strike had hit it while drivers were lined up for gasoline. "Nineteen people were killed, some burned beyond recognition," he says.

According to a U.N. satellite analysis, 1,171 structures in Saada City had been damaged or destroyed by airstrikes as of May 17th. The pattern of targets suggests that Saudi Arabia was focusing on Saada's infrastructure in an attempt to destroy its economy and flush out its civilian population.

I am told by the hospital staff that things are even worse in the rural border areas. The same day that we arrive at the hospital, there is news that there has been a strike in Radha, a remote village several hours away by road. Sure enough, that afternoon a procession of pickups screech into the hospital compound. The medical staff wheel up stretchers and pull bloodied figures out of the trucks. Soon there are bright-red spatters on the clean emergency-room floor as the hospital staff prepare patients for the operating theater. I ask a man leaning wearily against the back of a pickup, his clothes stained with his uncle's dried blood, what has happened.

"It was just after lunch, and people were leaving their houses," the man, Saleh Khairan, says. "There was a huge cluster bomb. We heard hundreds of explosions. They must have hit 50 houses, and at least one person from each house was killed or injured."

With gasoline so scarce, Khairan had been forced to pay a driver \$350 to make the three-and-a-half-hour drive to Saada City, an expense the family can scarcely afford. "We're too poor to leave," he says. "There are no military bases near us or anything. This was the first time we've been attacked in this war, but they've been using cluster bombs in the surrounding areas."

We drive out to the village of Sabr, about a half-hour outside the city, where hospital officials have told us one of the worst civilian-casualty incidents had occurred. The countryside we pass through is lush – Saada is known as the fruit basket of Yemen – but the fields and mud houses we pass look deserted. "It's mostly shepherds left," says Betal.

Sabr was an austere cluster of mud homes, some of them elaborate three-story forts. Half of it had been reduced to churned rubble. Two older residents, dressed in long robes and shawls, join us and tell us what had happened.

"I'VE NEVER SEEN WHAT I'VE SEEN HERE," SAYS A NURSE WHO'S TREATED VICTIMS FROM WARS IN SYRIA AND AFRICA.

On June 3rd, they say, an airstrike had hit several houses. Then, as the villagers worked to free victims from their collapsed homes, another wave of strikes had hit them. Betal arrived in an ambulance; he says the locals were hysterical and afraid to go back to try to rescue anyone. In all, they say, eight houses had been destroyed and 51 people killed. They produce a list of names with ages next to them – 36 of the victims were children. "These are their homes," Salem Ali says, pointing to the rubble. "My father's house is there." They claim there were no Houthi fighters or military targets in the village. "We don't know why they attacked us," he says.

It is impossible to verify their figures independently, but the MSF team confirm that there had been a large number of injured and killed who were brought to the hospital from the bombing in Sabr, their biggest incident to date, including eight children, many of them victims of asphyxiation or trauma from being trapped under the rubble.

As we speak, the recurring rumble of a Saudi jet grows louder and louder. It seems to be making circles over the valley, searching for targets. I imagine how we'd look from one of those infrared-camera videos they always play on TV: several pickup trucks full of men converge in a village and congregate together in some sort of meeting. Everyone looks suspicious as a ghostly infrared silhouette on those bomb-camera videos, and their evaporation in a white flash at the end feels justified and even satisfying.

The sound of the plane is excruciating. "I guess you must be used to hearing the

sound of the jets all day," I say to the men, trying to sound lighthearted. "I'm not, so it really makes me nervous."

"Normally, we would run away when we hear it this close," Ali replies, "but you are here with us and we don't want to make you afraid."

EVEN BEFORE THE WAR, MANY Yemenis lived in precarious poverty. About half the population lacked access to clean water, and the country imported 90 percent of its food from abroad. But the outbreak of heavy fighting, and in particular the blockade, has pushed them into a genuine humanitarian disaster. In June, the U.N. raised Yemen's crisis status to Category 3, its highest level, shared only by Syria, South Sudan and Iraq. And yet since the beginning of the conflict, the U.N. and the rest of the humanitarian community have struggled to deliver aid.

On our way back from Saada, we stop in Khamir, a small town set amid the rolling hills two hours north of the capital. Much of Saada's population has escaped to neighboring areas like this, part of a mass exodus of Yemeni civilians who have fled their homes and are desperately in need of assistance.

At the district hospital, I walk through the pediatric ward with Emmanuel Berbain, a French doctor who is part of a long-running MSF project here. In contrast to the mad urgency of the hospital in Saada, the ward has a funeral air, as black-robed, veiled mothers keep a silent vigil over the patients – there is nothing more somber than a roomful of silent children.

"Malnutrition is one of the side effects of the war and the blockade," Berbain says, examining a small boy who looks deflated from severe diarrhea. The influx of internally displaced persons, or IDPs, to Khamir means a surge in preventable illnesses: "Leishmaniasis, malaria, rickets."

In Yemen's traditional society, many IDPs are able to find shelter with their extended families, and others have been accommodated in government facilities like schools. Some, though, are simply on their own. Berbain and I jump into an MSF van and ride out to the edge of town, to an area known as the Khat Market, though it is just a series of barren, stepped fields overlooking the town. It is scattered with tents pitched on the open ground, some of them muddy old U.N. Refugee Agency shelters from past conflicts, others just tarps on sticks. "They basically have nothing. No food, no water," Berbain says. The U.N. hasn't shown up. A note of disbelief entered his voice. [Cont. on 66]

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The Force Is Strong With Wilco



The rockers' first LP since 2011 recaptures the wild freedom that makes them great



Wilco

Star Wars dBPM

★★★★½

BY JON DOLAN

Wilco are one of the most respected bands on the planet – paragons of good taste, masters of genre-bridging craftsmanship and chill independence. Considering that heavy rep, it's strange to think that when Jeff Tweedy put together Wilco's first lineup 20 years ago, their loose bar-band vibe was a defiant response to the weighty myth he'd shouldered as a member of alt-country pioneers Uncle Tupelo. Wilco's first album in four years recalls their early "hey, what the hell" freedom, in spirit if not in sound. It's their most concise, catchy, naturally songful album in at least a decade – the sound of a band reconnecting with the fun of rocking out together in a room.

Wilco's two most recent studio LPs – 2011's *The Whole Love* and 2009's *Wilco (The Album)* – were musically lavish, but also a touch staid, with their rough edges burnished to a too-smooth finish. Everything about *Star Wars* betrays ease and immediacy: They released it online for free with no warning. The jokey title references one of the most universally held pleasures in the history of human culture. The music is built on some pretty essential influences as well – from the *Abbey Road* majesty of "More..." and the roughnecked T. Rex shoo-goo-yooty of "Random Name

Generator" to the basement-glam punk attack of "Pickled Ginger" and the sad-ballad sweetness of "Magnetized."

Wilco have gotten back in touch with their own strengths, too – especially the ability to match instantly familiar melodies with beautifully jarring noise, which made 2002's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* and 1996's *Being There* into watersheds. "The Joke Explained" is a cute folk-rock ditty made full-on awesome by peals of searing Sonic Youth-style drone poetry. And then there's "You Satellite," the incandescent jam that serves as the album's elusive centerpiece. It's a seething yet warm meditation on clinging to faint light in dark times, with what sounds like a battalion of guitars roiling against drummer Glenn Kotche's avant-jazz tumble. Only Wilco could make something this eruptive feel so comfy, like a steel-wool security blanket.

The music's urgent, live-in-the-studio feel pairs well with Tweedy's lyrics, which seem more direct and compact than they have in a while. He's working his usual themes – doubt, devotion, everyday fears and resigned hopes – without any of the literary obscurity that sometimes creeps into his writing. "I was only after a friend to follow through," he sings on the lovely "Taste the Ceiling," sounding like John Lennon in a moment of hard-fought grace. You can't help wonder if *Sukierae*, the deeply personal side project he recorded last year with his teenage son Spencer on drums, might have helped revive Tweedy's feel for music's elemental joy.

In the album's most carefree moments, of which there are many, he sounds at home in himself – never an easy move for one of rock's top chroniclers of midlife man-malaise. "I belong to the stars in the sky," he sings on "Random Name Generator," making a blues boast out of spacey poesy and totally pulling it off. Give it up for the man. He's got the Force by the spaceballs.

LISTEN NOW!

Hear key tracks from these albums at RollingStone.com/albums.



Page, Bonham,
Plant and
Jones, 1977

A Revealing Last Look Inside Zeppelin's Vault

A deluxe reissue of 1982's 'Coda' is surprisingly great, with outtakes that span the band's full trailblazing career

Led Zeppelin *Coda* Atlantic/Swan Song

★★★★★



Released in 1982, two years after the death of drummer John Bonham, *Coda* was a late goodbye from the rest of Led Zeppelin – singer Robert Plant, bassist John Paul Jones and founding guitarist Jimmy Page – and paltry closure for everyone else: a mere half-hour of outtakes, including a drum solo. Three tracks were unused songs from 1979's *In Through the Out Door*; an awkward embrace of New Wave electronics and pop romanticism. The contrast between those songs and *Coda*'s opener, the early-prime bonfire "We're Gonna Groove," was not flattering. For the first time, in that threadbare collection, the most audacious hard-rock band of the Seventies sounded like a spent force.

Three decades later, *Coda* is the unlikely closing triumph in Page's series of deluxe Zeppelin reissues: a dynamic pocket history in rarities, across three discs with 15 bonus tracks, of his band's epic-blues achievement. There are familiar strays, such as "Baby Come On Home," from the sessions for 1969's *Led Zeppelin*, and the 1970 B side "Hey, Hey, What Can I Do." But Page has gone deep.

"Sugar Mama," cut for and left off *Led Zeppelin*, already suggests the tightly wound textural fury of *Led Zeppelin II*. "If It Keeps On Raining" is a truly alternate take of "When the Levee Breaks," on *Led Zeppelin IV* – less titanic, with more worried-blues nuance in Plant's vocal – and two long-bootlegged 1972 recordings by Page and Plant, made in India with members of the Bombay Orchestra, evoke their determined exploration of the global routes and branches in American blues and Celtic folk, on the way to the rugged spectacle of 1975's *Physical Graffiti*.

Page's final round of reissues includes two other sets: new editions of *In Through the Out Door* and the feral-guitar overload of 1976's *Presence*. The extra mixes essentially

KEY TRACK:

"If It Keeps On Raining"

mirror the original LPs, with a refreshing exception: "10 Ribs & All/Carrot Pod Pod (Pod)," an instrumental sketch from the *Presence* sessions starring Jones' jazz-nocturne piano. Even in *Coda*'s expanded context, the *Out Door* orphans "Ozone Baby" and "Darlene" are still lesser Zeppelin, an inconclusive response to the edge and concision of punk.

Rebirth, of course, was not an option; Bonham's death froze his band's legacy in place. Yet it's a story that keeps on giving. Once an afterthought, *Coda* is now a classic Led Zeppelin album: deep lore from their road to legend.

DAVID FRICKE



Fraser A. Gorman

Slow Gum

House Anxiety/Marathon/Milk!

★★★

Courtney Barnett pal daydreams through a pleasant debut LP

Likable 24-year-old folkie Fraser A. Gorman is the latest member of Courtney Barnett's circle of Melbourne singer-songwriters. But where Barnett trades in self-aware grunge paranoia, Gorman is a classic-rock romantic who daydreams about ex-girlfriends and road trips. His tastes can run eclectic: These ballads and alt-country rockers find Gorman singing "It's a strange old time to be in love with Elvis" in one song and paying tribute to Silver Jews in another. And while lines like "I'm a man/But lately you don't seem to wonder who I am" show that Gorman has room to develop as a lyricist, *Slow Gum* is a promising beginning.

JONATHAN BERNSTEIN



Various Artists

Nina Revisited: A Tribute to Nina Simone Revive/RCA

★★★½

Lauryn Hill, Mary J. Blige and more on a hit-or-miss covers LP

Nina Simone was a performer first and foremost; her recordings had to translate the drama and intensity of her live presence. This tribute set finds some of her clearest heirs – Lauryn Hill, Mary J. Blige, Common – reworking her standards with love, but the results veer sharply between transcendent and tepid. Hill brings power and grace to classics like "Feeling Good" and "Black Is the Color of My True Love's Hair." Singer-songwriter Alice Smith nearly steals the show with her bewitching "I Put a Spell on You." But it's Simone's own voice on the album's closing number, "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free," that reminds us what, and who, we're missing.

BRITTANY SPANOS



Titus Andronicus

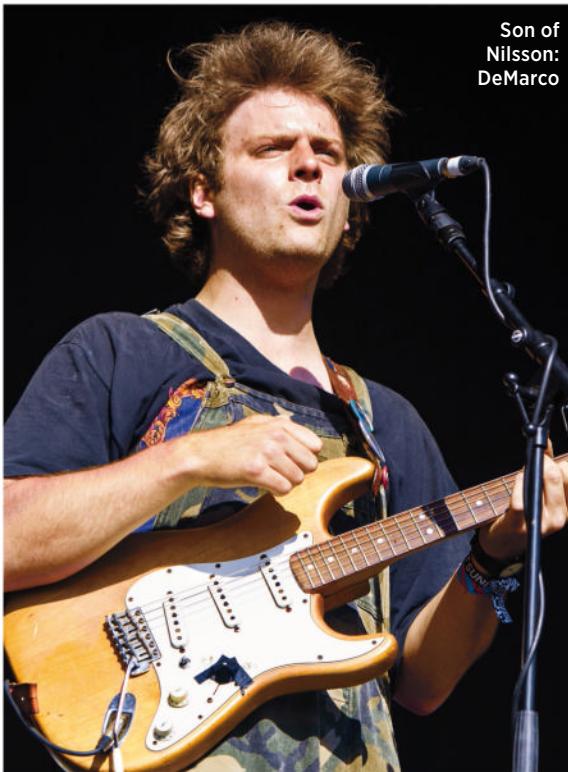
The Most Lamentable Tragedy Merge

★★★½

Maximalist punks get even more epic on a double-disc rock opera

New Jersey rock & roll believers Titus Andronicus get top mileage from a simple idea: baiting hardcore thrust with classic-rock hooks. On their fourth album, they bear down on a 90-minute rock opera in a *Quadrophenia* vein about growing up, freaking out and coming to unsettled terms. A shaggy chorale, a piano ballad, organ drones and Celtic touches – including a hurtling cover of the Pogues' "A Pair of Brown Eyes" – provide variety. But the center remains frontman Patrick Stickles' desperate howl, a mix of Johnny Rotten, Paul Westerberg and Conor Oberst that sounds fittingly trounced by the end. Long may he wail.

WILL HERMES



Son of
Nilsson:
DeMarco

A Soft-Rock Charmer Steps Up His Game

Mac DeMarco explores love and heartbreak on a sun-splashed set of Seventies-style songs

Mac DeMarco *Another One* Captured Tracks ★★★★½



A boy hero to indie-rock fans who prize delicately demented pop, Mac DeMarco has the casual grace of early Beck, bringing a shambolic scuzz to the creamy sounds of Seventies soft rock. His melodies and slide guitar stumble and dance their way through songs that often feel like reverse Polaroids: A fully developed image fades into haze as you watch.

Over the course of four releases since 2012 – not one of them more than 35 minutes long – the Canadian singer-songwriter has continually upped the ante without exactly playing high stakes, and this eight-track mini-LP is his craftiest set of tunes yet. The lyrics are full of heartbreak and longing, with DeMarco's voice and guitar threading through melancholy keyboards like a cat looking for a sunbeam in a room with the shades drawn. "Who could that be knocking at her door?" he asks in the title track, as he ponders love and trust slipping away. "Must be another one she loves." DeMarco has said that this is his stab at universal pop – everyone has found and lost love, after all. Sometimes it's all too universal: A chorus like "believe me, I've been waiting for her" has both a winning simplicity and a numbing familiarity. But at their best, these songs have a charm that's aching and amiable.

JOE LEVY



Teenage Time Killers

Greatest Hits Vol. 1 Rise

★★★½

Dave Grohl and pals get back to their basement-punk roots

Before they made major waves with Nirvana and Foo Fighters, Dave Grohl and Pat Smear shook up the underground as members of hardcore bands Scream and the Germs, respectively. They dive back into the CBGB-matinee mosh pit with Teenage Time Killers, a new all-star project including current or former singers from Slipknot, Lamb of God, Dead Kennedys and Fear. Though Grohl (who played bass and lent his 606 Studios to the cause) and cohorts are far from their teenage years, *Greatest Hits Vol. 1* rarely sounds like old guys trying to relive their pissed-off youth. Rather, it sneers and snarls like a long-lost punk mixtape, fueled by the forever-young rage of rockers who refuse to grow up.

BRANDON GEIST



Frank Turner

Positive Songs for Negative People Xtra Mile/Interscope

★★½

The most earnest man in all of England keeps on believing

"At this truth we have arrived/God damn, it's great to be alive," U.K. folk rocker Frank Turner sings, catapulting lyrics that many singers would be embarrassed to read aloud, let alone sing, into a towering anthem. A former frontman in a hardcore band, Turner specializes in earnest revelation, recalling fellow punks-turned-strummers like Billy Bragg and Dashboard Confessional. His sixth LP includes a retelling of the *Challenger* explosion from the perspective of Christa McAuliffe, and a rocker that promises to "lift up the weight of the world from your shoulders." Maybe subtlety's not his thing, but Turner's got a goofy kind of grandeur.

JON DOLAN



Ducktails

St. Catherine Domino

★★★

Real Estate guitarist steps out with a sweet, sleepy solo LP

In his main gig as Real Estate's guitarist, Matthew Mondanile helps provide the warm melodic hooks that drive the band's suburban bliss. Mondanile's side project, Ducktails, has typically offered him space to explore more abstract guitar moods, but his latest album refines that sprawl with more concise songwriting. A prime example is "Surreal Exposure," whose twangy guitar and lovesick tone could easily have found a home on one of Real Estate's breakthrough LPs. Even so, Mondanile doesn't simply reproduce the dynamic of his main band: A pair of drowsy instrumentals and three songs featuring vocals from arty composer Julia Holter add to a pleasantly diffuse vibe that's all his own.

DAVID TURNER



Lights up:
Bryan

Country's Nice Guy Kicks Up Some Dust

Luke Bryan's fifth album is packed with big hooks and Nashville clichés as fun as they come

Luke Bryan *Kill the Lights* Capitol Nashville ★★★

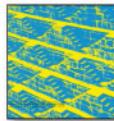


"I'm not an outlaw country singer," Luke Bryan recently informed a journalist. No shit: He's a platinum-selling bro-country standard-bearer, a stadium-packing spring-break soundtracker, a good ol' boy you could bring home to Mom — a pop star with a drawl, a ball cap and a Chevy Z71 full of cheeseball power-ballad guitar lines. Bryan's fifth studio album is well-turned Nashville radio bait, trite yet undeniable, sure to drive up bar tabs in 50 states and beyond.

Dude knows his core fan base, and it's no accident the lead three songs target ladies: The cornfield line-dance anthem "Kill the Dust Up" asks one gal to "back it on up," the Eighties-rockin' title track asks another to "pull me in," and the sexy, quiet-storm-ish "Strip It Down" instructs a lucky barefoot someone to "feel my belt turn loose from these old blue jeans." Sneer at the "lemme-lemme" hook of "Love It Gone" all you want, but there are actually some valuable lessons in how to care for your lover. Still, the best jam — "Home Alone Tonight," a firecracker duet with Little Big Town's Karen Fairchild — is about getting wasted with a barroom stranger, taking a selfie with 'em and sending it to your ex. Now that's country music. Nowadays, anyhow.

KEY TRACK:
"Home Alone
Tonight"

WILL HERMES



Four Tet

Morning/Evening Text

★★★½

British beat genius digs into his South Asian roots

Four Tet's music has moved deeper into the dance floor since his folk-tinged 2003 landmark, *Rounds*, but it hasn't become any less exquisite or psychedelic. His latest, released online sans fanfare, pairs tracks called "Morning" and "Evening" — each the length of an LP side — inspired by his late grandfather's collection of Hindi film soundtracks. Both sample Indian national heroine Lata Mangeshkar, the voice of hundreds of Bollywood musicals, now fluttering amid dancing synth melodies over pillow-y bass tones and plush orchestral beds. Club beats pound on "Morning," then dissolve; "Evening" flips and reverses the arc — an invitation to click "repeat" and play it all day.

WILL HERMES



Migos

Yung Rich Nation

Quality Control/300

★★★

Atlanta's kings of braggadocio celebrate their fame and riches

The first proper studio album from high-octane Atlanta trio Migos isn't all that different from the piles of acclaimed free mixtapes they've released. On all but a few tracks, *Yung Rich Nation* sticks to their addictive formula of raps that tumble out in polyrhythmic triplets and ad-libs that punctuate like paintballs, all soaked in a giddy *joie de vivre*. The biggest distinction is lyrical: Tales of slinging drugs are starting to fade in favor of boasts that remind you of their rising fame ("Recognition"). And while there's nothing here remotely as unstoppable as 2013's "Versace," highlights like "What a Feeling" show off enough fresh flows to make this a victory party worth joining.

CHRISTOPHER R. WEINGARTEN



Albert Hammond Jr.

Momentary Masters

Vagrant



Solo Stroke gets reflective on a warm, cozy LP

While Strokes frontman Julian Casablancas pursues his artier impulses, guitarist Albert Hammond Jr. packs his third solo disc with the band's signature crisp melodies, curt guitar churn and New Wave synth ripple. As a singer-lyricist, though, Hammond has an openhearted, quizzical mien that's a far cry from the Strokes' poker-faced chic. The tunes could at times be tighter, but his charm sells them, especially on "Born Slippy," which cops a title from Nineties EDM gods Underworld for a cute meditation on the passage of time. He's a Stroke for all seasons.

JON DOLAN



Buddy Guy

Born to Play Guitar RCA

A blues great serves up an apt reminder of his mastery

Guitarist Buddy Guy – one of the last working giants from the electric blues' greatest generation – traces his life in mission and missing, from the crackling title cut to the B.B. King memorial "Flesh and Blood," sung with Van Morrison, and "Come Back Muddy," a message to Guy's late boss, Muddy Waters. Guy co-wrote just four songs here, but he sings and solos with reliable ferocity; two tracks with harpist Kim Wilson evoke his classic partnership with Junior Wells. "I was born to play the guitar/People, I got blues running through my veins," Guy sings – lines he didn't write but lived. In the blues, that's what matters.

DAVID FRICKE



Meek Mill

Dreams Worth More Than Money

MMG/Atlantic



Philly rapper stacks bullhorn flows, urgent lines to the sky

Meek Mill is one of hip-hop's most powerful brag machines, hollering blunt-force boasts with desperate energy and unctut brio. His second major-label LP continues to show off his flair for internal wordplay ("Mommy was a booster, Daddy was a shooter/So they couldn't blame me when I went and copped the Ruger/Looking at my homie, see the ghost of Freddy Krueger"). But his best moments are scary in a different way: "In my city, we talk heavy and die young," he raps on "The Trillest." It's a message that booms out louder than life.

JON DOLAN



Ratatat

Magnifique XL

Brooklyn dudes create some more ambling magic

Instrumental duo Ratatat are indie studio geeks with superproducer chops, just as comfortable reimagining Biggie Smalls joints (see 2006's hip-hop-themed *Remixes Vol. 2*) as they are cranking out grooves that suggest a dreamier Daft Punk. Their first album in five years goes heavy on space-age synths, elegiac guitar cheese and chunky disco beats. There are also a couple of lovely slow tunes that deploy steel guitar, a new addition to their trick bag ("Supreme"). But as with every Ratatat record, *Magnifique* leaves you wondering what they could do if they fleshed these out into actual songs with real singers.

JON DOLAN

Unknown Mortal Orchestra

Multi-Love Jagjaguwar

Psychedelic crew mourns the end of a three-way love

Unknown Mortal Orchestra's music has often explored isolation, but on their third LP, New Zealand-born frontman Ruban Nielson embraces the power of three. Taking cues from the bubbly soul of Stevie Wonder and Tijuana Brass melodrama, Nielson muses on a polyamorous relationship that ended when his lover was forced out by a woeful immigration policy. All the psychedelic cool in the world can't hide his ire: "America, open up your doors/Is it right to always fight against the other?" he pleads on "Puzzles." *Multi-Love* is a vibrant vision of connection.

SUZY EXPOSITO

Flo Morrissey

Tomorrow Will Be Beautiful Glassnote

British singer's debut LP offers folk-pop pleasures

When Flo Morrissey rhapsodizes about "singing through the sky," it's easy to imagine her floating through the clouds with a golden lyre. Joanna Newsom producer Noah Georgeson provides the enchanted-forest backdrops for the 20-year-old Brit's ethereal voice; you'll get lost in the lush romanticism of "Why," and the terrifically titled "I Only Like His Hat, Not Him" oozes woozy charm. At times, her melancholy lilt evokes that other Morrissey, but when she sings, "Please don't think I'm sad/Happiness is my friend in the end," heaven knows Flo isn't miserable now.

CHUCK ARNOLD

BACKSTAGE PASS

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65

KEVIN HART

[Cont. from 51] is to take away whatever problems are in the world, for that brief moment of time."

AFTER THE STAPLES SHOW, HART makes a quick exit and heads in the Sprinter to a tiny airfield in Van Nuys, where a small chartered jet awaits. No identification is needed to board. No seat belts are fastened. A pretty woman dressed all in black takes drink and food orders. Hart retires to the back, covers up with a blanket and falls asleep. When the plane lands the next morning at an airstrip in Bedford, Massachusetts, it's drizzling outside. Three luxury SUVs await on the tarmac, feet from the plane. In the strip's office, a worker in a bright-orange reflective vest says that when Dwayne Johnson flew in the other day, "all the women who work here were trying to get a look at him," but it's early now, and no one's around to gawk at Hart. Parrish and the kids take one SUV to a house they've rented in the suburb of Winchester. Hart, operating on no more than four hours of sleep, takes another SUV to the set.

The film Hart's shooting with Johnson is an action comedy called *Central Intelligence*. The first shot of the day requires the co-stars to be hoisted up on harnesses in front of a 40-by-45-foot blue backdrop. In the movie, it will look as though they've just jumped from a building. As Hart and the Rock regard the looming crane that will be taking them airborne, they rib each other.

"I'm gonna be shitting on you all day!" Hart tells him.

"Shut your mouth!" says the Rock. He turns to me: "Watch Kevin piss his pants up there."

Hart's job, over dozens of ensuing takes, is essentially to shout, "Fuck-fuck-fuck-fuck-fuck-fuck!" or simply shriek unintelligibly while feigning free fall. It is tedious, repetitive work, but he does it with full-throated conviction each time.

Between setups, Hart has returned to solid ground, at which point the director, Rawson Marshall Thurber, walks over to the tent where Hart's standing. Hart is wearing a sweater under the hot midday sun, bouncing in place, awaiting the next take. I say it looks like he's having a great time up on the wire. "I'm not!" he replies. Thurber grins, slaps Hart affectionately on the shoulder and says that he's a master at hiding his fatigue behind a facade of manic enthusiasm. "Kevin is like my dad when you put on a movie," Thurber says. "If he stops moving, he'll fall asleep."

Hart nods his head vigorously, pretends to pass out, then snaps his eyes open wide and laughs. "Can't stop!" he cries.

He shifts his weight from foot to foot, bouncing in place. "If you sit me still, we're in trouble!"

YEMEN

[Cont. from 59] "There is no food distribution in all of Khamir." (A U.N. spokesman says food aid arrived in July.)

As we drove past one group of tents, Berbain tells the driver to stop, and he chats with a woman and asks if her child's itching had subsided yet. When we continued on, he pointed to some stray mutts lurking near the tents. "The dogs are shitting in the fields, and it spreads diseases," he explains. "Their child has ancylostomiasis." He makes a clawing motion against his chest: "It's worms moving under the skin."

As we tour the camp, Berbain is incredulous that the U.N. and the rest of the international humanitarian community are simply allowing people to die of starvation and exposure. "It's amazing. How is it possible that there can be so many IDPs without any response?" he says. "And it's getting worse every day."

International funding for aid has been slow to arrive to Yemen. When the U.N. issued a "flash appeal" for \$274 million in aid in April, the Saudi government immediately pledged the entire amount. As of mid-July, none of the money had been delivered. "When the Saudis committed right off the bat, it made a lot of other donors relax the urgency on their contributions," says an official in charge of an international agency operating in Yemen. "Everyone's wondering if this is what the Saudis intended, or if they simply committed all the money without realizing they would not be in charge of where it went."

The biggest constraint on aid, however, remains the Saudi coalition's blockade of Yemen's airports, borders and shipping. Critics in the humanitarian community say it amounts to the collective punishment of an entire nation, and an example of siege warfare against civilian populations that is forbidden under international law. Saudi Arabia has disputed the term "blockade" and refers to the enforcement of a "restricted zone" and "controlled maritime area," whose purpose is to interdict Iranian weapons. While the coalition does allow some approved shipping into the country, the flow of essential goods has been strangled to a trickle. At the end of June, the U.N. estimated that Yemen was getting only 11 percent of its prewar fuel imports, and the gas shortage had drastically impeded aid delivery across the country.

The U.N. and the rest of the humanitarian community have been desperately pushing for a cease-fire, with little success. The U.N. special envoy, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, has been shuttling back and forth between Sana'a, Riyadh and Geneva, trying to kick-start peace negotiations that no one seems interested in. Both the Houthis and Hadi's government sent teams to Geneva in June for talks, but

nothing came of it. And Ahmed was embarrassed in July when, a day after the announcement that he had brokered a cease-fire for the final week of Ramadan, Saudi jets continued bombing Yemen and the Houthis continued fighting on the ground. The Saudis said that they did not recognize the cease-fire.

DURING MY VISIT, THE QUESTION that I am most frequently asked by Yemenis is, "What do you think will happen to us?"

Yemen's Byzantine, fractious politics seem to confound even experienced observers. And yet, looking at what has already happened in Libya, Iraq and Syria, there seemed to be a precedent. Yemen's war will intensify. Rival sides will splinter into even smaller, more brutal militias. Regional powers will pour fuel on the fire in the pursuit of their own rivalries and domestic agendas, despite the risk of blowback. The international community will stand by helplessly. A massive human tragedy will unfold, shattering millions of lives and sending refugees into teeming camps and to the shores of an unwelcoming West. And a succession of increasingly nihilistic jihadist groups, the war's only winners, will thrive and pose a grave threat to the world.

"The world hasn't learned anything from the Syrian experience," Faqih, the human rights activist, tells me. "What's happening in Yemen is creating an environment that encourages jihadist groups. They have been dreaming of this day."

It may not be too late for Yemen. It may be that the genies of war and sectarian madness can somehow be put back in their bottles. If the U.S. can pressure Saudi Arabia and the coalition into ceasing the bombing and blockade, and in return the Houthis agree to stop their march on the rest of the country; if Saudi Arabia and Iran can be persuaded to leave Yemen out of their rivalry; and all sides within Yemen return to the table at Geneva — then maybe, just maybe, the country has a chance.

Faqih looks out the window. "I think the worst case is coming, without a miracle," he says, and chuckles bitterly. "And there are no miracles."

On the night before Ramadan begins — my last night in Yemen — a series of car bombs go off around Sana'a. Three hit mosques in the city, and another targets the offices of Ansar Allah's political committee. At the scene, I meet Bukhaiti, the Houthi leader I had interviewed, examining a hunk of twisted metal that had been a Hyundai Sonata. The bombings would soon be claimed by ISIS, but Bukhaiti isn't in the mood to make distinctions. "The Saudis, as well as Al Qaeda and ISIS — it's all the same," he says, his face made gaunt by the beam of a flashlight. "We're expecting that there will be more."



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Cruise's Need for Speed

Can Tom Cruise still do the impossible at 53? Just watch him try

By Peter Travers

Mission: Impossible - Rogue Nation

Tom Cruise

Directed by Christopher McQuarrie

★★★

TOM CRUISE HIT ON A TANGY idea when he decided to turn the old-school CBS series *Mission: Impossible* (1966-1973) into a film franchise. As producer as well as star, Cruise puts a new director in charge of every movie. So far at the helm, since 1996, we've had Brian De Palma, John Woo, J.J. Abrams and Brad Bird (his *Ghost Protocol* is my fave and the biggest box-office hit in the bunch). Cruise, 53, will presumably play IMF (Impossible Mission Force) undercover agent Ethan Hunt until he's eligible for AARP. Fine by me. Back in a galaxy far, far away (1986's *Top Gun*), Cruise had a killer line: "I feel the need, the need for speed." He's still feeling it. This dude can run, jump, climb, ride and fight like a muthafucker, often shirtless.

Cruise is back in action for the fifth time, and no worse for wear, in *Mission: Impossible - Rogue Nation*. The director is Christopher McQuarrie, who cooked up something moody and intense with Cruise in 2012's *Jack Reacher*. But McQuarrie has never worked on this huge a scale, and the strain to go big and bigger sometimes shows. The movie begins with Ethan hanging from the side of an Airbus A400M cargo plane during takeoff. Why? That kind of question is irrelevant in a franchise in which action trumps logic at every turn.

And yet, McQuarrie – an Oscar winner for his script for 1995's *The Usual Suspects* – has an ace to play. That's the indie sensibility he brings to the usual Hollywood FX. Don't get me wrong. *Rogue Nation*



ALL REVVED UP
Cruise hits Morocco for the hog ride of his life.

doesn't skimp on the wow factor, especially a Moroccan motorcycle chase and an underwater sequence that has Ethan whooshing around like a sock during spin cycle. And the laughs kick in whenever Ethan gets help from his miracle-working teammates Benji (Simon Pegg, priceless) and Luther (Ving Rhames). The plot, such as it is, involves Ethan and Agent Brandt (Jeremy Renner)

trying to save the IMF from extinction by the CIA, led by an exposition-spouting Alec Baldwin. No one believes Ethan that a mysterious Syndicate is hell-bent on seizing global control.

McQuarrie borrows elements of mythical evil from *Suspects* when Ethan and the double-dealing British agent Ilsa Faust (a ready-to-rock Rebecca Ferguson) lock horns with mega-creepy Solomon

Lane (Sean Harris), a villain cut from the same cloth as Keyser Söze. Harris, best known for *The Borgias*, can't compete with Kevin Spacey's iconic Söze. Neither can *Rogue Nation*, which succeeds best when McQuarrie channels his inner film geek and stages a spectacular shootout at the Vienna opera house that evokes Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. This knockout sequence, in which Cruise fires up everything he has as actor and athlete, shows that *Mission: Impossible* still has gas in its tank even when its engine sputters.

Revenge of the Gamer Nerds

Pixels

Adam Sandler, Peter Dinklage, Josh Gad

Directed by Chris Columbus

★

Aliens attack Earth disguised as characters from 1980s video games. Right, Pac-Man and Donkey Kong want to kill us. Our only hope lies with arcade geeks now grown up but still immature and played by Adam Sandler, Josh Gad, Peter Dinklage and Kevin James (he's the president). Director Chris Columbus surely hopes that today's teen gamers, hooked on Halo and Call of Duty, will care about what happened 30 years ago. That's iffy, unless



13-year-olds think it's a scream when Dinklage asks to be part of a sex sandwich with Serena Williams and Martha Stewart, who both do cameos. Yikes! I saw *Pixels* as a 3D metaphor for Hollywood's digital assault on our eyes and brains. Not funny. Just relentless and exhausting.

Southpaw

Jake Gyllenhaal

Directed by Antoine Fuqua

★★½

JAKE GYLLENHAAL IS ON A roll. Onscreen in *Nightcrawler*, *Enemy* and *Prisoners*, and on-stage in *Constellations*, *Little Shop of Horrors* and *If There Is I Haven't Found It Yet*, he shows the kind of versatility and commitment that should have won him prizes. The awards didn't materialize, but it's just a matter of time. Maybe it'll be for *Southpaw*, a retro, in-your-face fight drama that dribbles

into sappiness. Much, though far from all, is redeemed by Gyllenhaal's virtuoso performance. The actor, 34, trained for four months and gained 15 pounds of muscle to play light-heavyweight champ Billy Hope. But the externals – scars, tattoos and slurred voice – don't begin to suggest the emotional depths Gyllenhaal brings to the part of a bruiser on the ropes.

Billy is at the top of his game, but constant jabs have left him punchy. His wife, Maureen (Rachel McAdams), wants him to slow down and enjoy their 11-year-old daughter, Leila (a feisty Oona Laurence). Maureen is way more than lacquered hair, nails and spray tan. She and Billy were raised in Hell's Kitchen orphans. McAdams, strong and smoldering, is explosively good. Spoiler alert: Her role is shortened when Maureen is involved in a shooting accident sparked by Miguel Escobar (Miguel Gomez), a fighter who thinks he can goad Billy into taking him on for high stakes.

Director Antoine Fuqua (*Training Day*, *The Equalizer*), working from an overcooked screenplay by Kurt Sutter (*Sons of Anarchy*), knows he's not in the same ring with *Raging Bull*, *Rocky*, *Million Dollar Baby* and *The Fighter*, though the script unblushingly mooches from each of them. Still, Fuqua shuffles the tools of the genre with genuine flair. As tragedy lands Billy in the pits of desperation, poverty and child-custody battles, Fuqua shifts focus from Billy's crooked agent (Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson) to a trainer-savior, Tick Wills (the expert Forest Whitaker), who teaches Billy a new fighting style that doesn't involve stopping punches with his head. The powerful boxing scenes, vividly shot from Madison Square Garden to Vegas by Mauro Fiore and edited by John Requa, help distract from the father-daughter scenes that outdo *The Champ* (the Wallace Beery original and the Jon Voight remake) for gooey sentiment. Amazingly, Gyllenhaal never cheats on his character's sense of dignity. Against the odds, he keeps you in Billy's corner. That's a champ.

Vacation

Ed Helms, Chevy Chase

Directed by Jonathan Goldstein and John Francis Daley

★½

MAYBE NATIONAL LAMPOON'S *Vacation* comedies, begun in 1983, hit your sweet spot. Maybe it'll hit again with this next-generation reboot from writer-directors Jona-

The End of the Tour

Jason Segel, Jesse Eisenberg

Directed by James Ponsoldt

★★★½

WHERE'S THE DRAMA AND, hell, the laughs in the non-spectacle of two writers talking with and at each other? For a riveting answer, check out *The End of the Tour*. The film is based on the 2010 book *Although of Course*



(1) McAdams and Gyllenhaal find love on the ropes in *Southpaw*.
 (2) Stebbins, Applegate and Helms hit rough water in *Vacation*.
 (3) Segel and Eisenberg play head games in *The End of the Tour*.

than Goldstein and John Francis Daley. With Ed Helms as Rusty Griswold – son of Clark (Chevy Chase) and Ellen (Beverly D'Angelo) – taking his wife, Debbie (Christina Applegate), and sons, James (Skyler Gisondo) and Kevin (Steele Stebbins), down holiday road, there must be raucous R-rated fun. You'd think, but the gags about pedophiles and eating shit smack of desperation. Leslie Mann and wild-card Chris Hemsworth, as her cock-flashing hubby, get the heartiest hoots. The rest is comic history warmed over.

You End Up Becoming Yourself, by ROLLING STONE writer David Lipsky. Over five days in 1996, Lipsky (Jesse Eisenberg) interviewed celebrated novelist and essayist David Foster Wallace (Jason Segel, like you've never seen him before). It was the end of Wallace's tour for his magnum opus, *Infinite Jest*. It wasn't until after the depression-plagued Wallace hanged himself in 2008 that Lipsky used the material in a story that won a National Magazine Award and became the basis for his book. Suicide hangs over the

movie as it did the book, scrambling our thoughts and perhaps helping us achieve a greater understanding.

Nothing and everything happen in the movie. Director James Ponsoldt (*The Spectacular Now*), working from a fluid script by playwright Donald Margulies, does justice to the book without compromising his film. This is no biopic. The story takes place when the bandanna-wearing Wallace was at the peak of his success and trying in his own shambling, humane way to deal with it.

From the moment Lipsky, played with seductive intelligence and a secret smile by Eisenberg, arrives at Wallace's bachelor cave in snowbound Bloomington, Illinois, the scene is set for mesmerizing mind games. The more Lipsky pushes – his editor (Ron Livingston) wants details of the author's alleged heroin addiction – the warier Wallace becomes.

So we watch as Lipsky and Wallace travel by car, bus and jet trying to suss each other out, to touch a nerve, to form a bond. In Minneapolis, they eat junk food and argue pop culture. Then, at dinner with Wallace's pal Julie (Mamie Gummer) and his former college love Betsy (Mickey Sumner), the low-key author accuses Lipsky of crass flirting. His words sting. Segel, giving the performance of his career, potently catches Wallace's internal conflicts.

As the details accumulate, so does the power of the film, an illuminating meditation on art and life that hits you hard with its ferocity and feeling. What could have been a static record of a conversation becomes kinetic cinema of startling immediacy. Lipsky wrote, "Books are a social substitute; you read people who, at one level, you'd like to hang out with." *The End of the Tour* lets us hang out with two different writers who strive rigorously to never completely let their guard down. Although of course they end up becoming themselves. Right in front of us. That's what makes the movie, elevated by two extraordinary actors, an exhilarating gift. In the last image Ponsoldt gives us of Wallace, the former athlete is doing something that distills what his words do with such artful abandon: dancing.

OUR BACK PAGES

FROM THE ROLLING STONE VAULT



RS 797 OCTOBER 15TH, 1998

Marilyn's Sweet Dreams

For his second RS cover story, Marilyn Manson met writer Chris Heath at a Wolfgang Puck restaurant in Hollywood and saw the Christina Ricci movie *The Opposite of Sex*. "He was open about the fact there was some theater involved," Heath says, "but you can see from what he was saying that there's some very weird, dark stuff working its way out through him." Says photographer Mark Seliger, "The John Wayne Gacy clown pictures in his house were a little nutty and dark. Besides that, he was pretty lovely and normal in every other way."



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1998: On the Charts Week of Oct. 10

- 1 **The First Night**
Monica Arista
- 2 **One Week**
Barenaked Ladies Reprise
- 3 **I Don't Want to Miss a Thing**
Aerosmith Columbia
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Jennifer Paige Edel America
- 5 **I'll Be**
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- 6 **How Deep Is Your Love**
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- 7 **This Kiss**
Faith Hill Warner Bros. Nashville
- 8 **My Way** Usher LaFace
- 9 **Time After Time**
Inej So So Def
- 10 **When the Lights Go Out**
Five Arista

Reviewed in the Issue RS 797

PJ Harvey Is This Desire?
Island ★★★★



"For all the gothed-up gloom, *Is This Desire?* is a lot of fun. Harvey makes deranged fantasies of feminine evil sound like a righteous Saturday night... a bleak and stormy one."

Elvis Costello With Burt Bacharach Painted From Memory Mercury ★★★★



Bacharach is again in vogue; his opulent brand of Sixties-pop songwriting has found a new audience among swizzle-stick hipsters. Costello has found his most empathetic sidekick yet. Thanks to Bacharach, Costello's bile has never sounded so sweet."



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